OVER BEMERTON'S

E·V·LUCAS

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OVER BEMERTON'S

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

LISTENER'S LURE
THE OPEN ROAD
THE FRIENDLY TOWN
THE GENTLEST ART
FIRESIDE AND SUNSHINE
CHARACTER AND COMEDY
THE LADIES' PAGEANT
A WANDERER IN HOLLAND
A WANDERER IN LONDON
ANNE'S TERRIBLE GOOD-NATURE

OVER BEMERTON'S

AN EASY-GOING CHRONICLE

BY

E. V. LUCAS

"IT IS VERY DIFFICULT FOR HUMAN BEINGS NOT TO INFLUENCE EACH OTHER: WE ARE ALL LINKS IN A CHAIN." — *Observer's Corner*

New York
THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
1908

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OVER BEMERTON'S

CHAPTER I

ONE TRAVELLER RETURNS AND FINDS A HOME IN WESTMINSTER

"MR. FALCONER," said Naomi to Mrs. Duckie, "wants quiet, clean rooms and the simplest cooking. Rarely anything but breakfast, and that very light. It must be in this neighbourhood, so as to be near Queen Anne's Gate."

Mrs. Duckie said that hers were the quietest rooms in London and almost the nearest to Queen Anne's Gate: certainly the nearest quiet rooms. As for her cooking, although she had of course in her time served up for dinner parties of ten or a dozen, when she was with Canon Lyme, she was famous for her small happetising meals too. If Mr. Dabney was only up and dressed we might ask him.

Mr. Dabney had the rooms above mine — or, I should say, above those which (as I could see)

Naomi intended should be mine in about five minutes — but being a gentleman on the press who kept very late hours, he did not appear till nearly lunch time; — all gentlemen who use their heads, said Mrs. Duckie, needing their full eight hours, if not nine. As for herself, she could do with six or seven; but Duckie wanted his full eight, and had them too, coming as he did from a sleepy stock. She had known him of a Saturday night when he had slep' for a good ten.

"I also like to get up late," I said, "but that is owing to my misfortune in being unable to sleep well. I suffer very badly from insomnia."

"Yes," said Naomi, "and that is one reason why I brought you first to these rooms, because of the advantage of living over a second-hand bookseller's shop. Don't you see that there will always be something to read? When you can't sleep," she hurried on, "and you are tired of all your own books, as one then is, you have only to get up, light a candle, slip on your dressing-gown" (Naomi's mind is all hopefulness and practical method), "and go down to the shop for as many others as you want. Because of course you will become friends with the bookseller directly. You always do."

"All very well; but how if the bookseller only rents the ground floor and basement and lives four miles away in Harringay with the key under his pillow? which as a matter of fact he does, for Mrs. — er — Mrs. — told me so while you were looking at the bathroom. What then, Naomi?"

"Oh, I don't think anything of that," she said: "why, he'll give you a duplicate key within a week. And look," she went on, "what splendid cupboards those are, and it's a Lambert grate too, and it's known that they throw the heat right out into the room" (Naomi has no scepticism in her, and she remembers so many advertisements), "and it is so convenient to have the bedroom and the bathroom leading out of each other. It is a good bath, too: the hot water comes at once."

"How long does it run hot?" I asked.

"Dear Kent," she cried, now as completely on the side of the landlady as if they were in partnership, "you are so suspicious. It keeps hot all the time. I tried it."

Mrs. Duckie corroborated. "There isn't another house within a mile," she said, "which lets rooms that has a bathroom like ours. It was put in by the landlord when he thought of living here himself, and then of course he had his accident and married the nurse and settled down at Hendon for life. And though I wish him nothing but happiness, it's an accident that I've found it in my heart to be very thankful for, laying in that beautiful bath of a Saturday night."

"After the books and the bathroom," Naomi broke in, "the best thing is the corner position. The windows look right along two streets. Think how interesting that will be sometimes. Because I shall put your table in the corner, so that you can look up from your reading and see out of both equally well."

I mentioned something about draughts.

"Oh no," said Naomi; "there will be india-rubber piping put all round, and sandbags over the cracks."

"They are such a violent red," I said.

"Yes, of course, when you buy them," said Naomi, who thinks ahead by instinct, "but I shall cover them for you. I saw some stuff at Libnett's the other day. I think purple is the colour for this room, and blue for the bedroom. Yes, purple and blue. I will send for a book of patterns at once, and we can choose them to-morrow morning when the light is good."

"But the 'Goat and Compasses' opposite," I said, determined to be as difficult as I could, "isn't that rather near?"

"Not a better conducted house in London," Mrs. Duckie at once broke in. "The landlord and the landlady are as nice a couple as God Almighty ever set behind a bar. He was butler to Lord Latimer, and she was the cook, and his Lordship left them each five hundred pounds. They've only been there eight months, and already the place is so changed you wouldn't know it. The difference between it now and what it used to be!" Mrs. Duckie raised her hands. "I assure you, miss," she said, "that if you had brought your — your ——"

"Grandfather," I suggested.

"Oh no, sir!" said Mrs. Duckie. "What a thing to say! Grandfather indeed! Why, you're in your prime."

"Of course," said Naomi, "what rubbish you talk!"

"As I was saying," Mrs. Duckie continued, "if you had brought him to these rooms a year ago, and implored me on your bended knees to let him take them at twice the rent, I should have said no. My conscience wouldn't have permitted me to let them to a refined gentleman with insomnia and scholarly ways of life and relations in Queen Anne's Gate. I should have said no. But now — why, I might be living in the Little Cloisters at the Abbey again, it's so respectable and quiet."

"The sign of the 'Goat and Compasses,'" I remarked, "is said to be derived from the words, 'God encompasseth us.'"

"I shouldn't be surprised," said Mrs. Duckie, who at that moment was called away.

"Then you insist on my taking these rooms," I said to Naomi.

"No, Kent, not insist," she answered. "But they're really nice rooms. And central too. You've only got to cross the bridge and you're all among your Clubs and everything else, and such a nice walk to lunch through the park among the ducks and cormorants. I should be miserable if you were in Jermyn Street with no compulsory nice walk at all. And you're close to us and the Stores."

"Yes," I said, "and if ever I choose to go into Parliament, which any one may do to-day, how convenient! And how easy to become a Roman

Catholic, with the new Cathedral so handy! And I might buy one of the Thames steamboats, which I am told are going very cheap, and keep it at Westminster Bridge."

Naomi laughed. She laughs at me now and then, not because she thinks I am particularly funny, but because she knows it makes me happier to think that I am thought funny. For Naomi takes things as they come, and, like most women, has no need of jokes. Brightness and sense appeal to her more than all fantasy, wit, or cleverness. People who think ahead are bound to be rather automatically receptive, and as a matter of fact her mind was already turning over the patterns; but the undercurrent of sweetness always running in her nature prompted her little kindly laugh. Deceptive, no doubt, but innocently so. A gentle hypocrisy is not only the basis but the salt of civilised life.

"The only objection left," I said, "is the name of the landlady. Do I really understand you to say that it is Duckie?"

Naomi laughed outright. This struck her as being really funny. "But, my dear Kent," she said, "you would not refuse good rooms because of the landlady's name?"

"Oh yes, I would," I replied. "That's exactly what I would do."

"Not when all you have to do," said Naomi, "is to call her something else? One of our parlourmaids was named Victoria, but we called her Jane. You could call Mrs. Duckie Landlady or Housekeeper."

At this moment Mrs. Duckie returned, and I took the rooms without another word.

"Mr. Bemerton will be very pleased," she said. "Mr. Bemerton has the book shop downstairs. He asks me every day if I have a tenant yet, and he has been hoping it would be some one who is fond of reading."

As a matter of fact (although I did not tell Naomi so, wishing her to think that it was all her doing), as a matter of fact, I had made up my mind directly I saw the book shop underneath, that unless there were very imposing obstacles I should make these rooms my home. My feet have always led me naturally to second-hand booksellers' shops, and after thirty years of exile in such a bookless city as Buenos Ayres, the idea of being so close to one of these little terrestrial heavens was too much for me. Besides, think of the name — Bemerton — with the suggestion of holy Mr. Herbert in it.

That was my fate, I knew swiftly (as one does know his fate at fifty-five). I was to live over Bemerton's.

Having arranged to send in some paperhangers and painters at once, we bade Mrs. Duckie farewell and descended the stairs to the street; but I would not depart until I had bought a book for luck. Being a profound believer in the humour if not the reason of chance, I told Naomi that from the first shelf on the left hand that came as high as my heart I would buy two books: for her, the twenty-ninth book from the doorway

(her age is twenty-nine); for me, the fifty-fifth; — no matter what the subject and no matter what the price.

And what do you think they were? Naomi's by curious and very pleasant fortune was *Walton's Lives* (with holy Mr. Herbert of Bemerton shedding a gentle light over all); and mine was a fat volume in a yellow paper cover, lying on its side, for which I had to pay two solid English pounds.

Naomi's face was a picture of disapproval as I produced the money; for she is no believer in fate and no supporter of supine acquiescence, wise receptivity, and all the rest of it: Naomi believes in self-help and courage and in getting one's books from the London Library. But when she saw the title her expression changed from disapproval to positive grief, for it ran thus: *A Chinese Biographical Dictionary*, by Herbert A. Giles, London and Shanghai, 1898.

"My dear Kent," she cried, "how very wrong of you to do these silly superstitious things! Whatever can you find to interest you in Chinese biography?"

"My dear young lady," said the bookseller, "you make a great mistake. The gentleman has bought what is at once one of the best and the least known books in this shop. If he looks at it to-night, however casually, and does not agree with me, I will cheerfully give him two pounds again for it to-morrow morning."

Directly Naomi heard this she brightened again — for was there not a bargain in the air? — and off

we trotted to Queen Anne's Gate in very good humour, talking furniture and decoration all the way, with a word as to the promising and unusual business habits of Mr. Bemerton, and a few remarks from me on the favourite topic of the kindness of chance when one really gives her her head and refrains from even the shadow of authority.

To this Naomi replied that she thought, all things considered, that I had better get most of the things at the Stores rather than go all the way to Tottenham Court Road.

CHAPTER II

INTRODUCING THE READER TO MR. AND MRS. WYNNE, A COUNTY CRICKETER, A SUFFRAGETTE, AN HEIR OF THE AGES, AND AN ANGEL

QUEEN ANNE'S GATE, where my stepsister and her family live, is, I think, save for the lack of sun, the most attractive street in London. My stepsister's house backing on the Park, the windows on that side pick up some kindly oblique rays in the afternoon, but in the morning they are sunless. My stepsister, who is an optimist, says, however, that she would as soon see from her rooms London lit by the sun as have the sun herself.

Certainly she has made her own especial sanctuary very charming, and the view over the Park and the water to the cool line of Carlton House Terrace and the grey mist above is very soothing. To the right is the half smoked, half gleaming stone-work of the Government offices.

It is a quiet spot, undisturbed by shattering traffic. One sits here within sound of the greater

music of the city, but so far removed from it that the cries of the water-fowl and the cooing of outrageously fat pigeons come soothingly to the ear. Now and then a bugle sounds in the neighbouring barracks. Big Ben booms the hours. In the room at the top of the house which I occupied on my return from abroad while Naomi was scouring the neighbourhood for a lodging for me, I used, as I lay awake at night, to hear the water-fowl so clearly that at first it seemed like old days in Norfolk. Now, it is a circumstance worth recording that after Norfolk there is no place where one can so certainly count upon watching the sure strong flight of wild-duck as St. James's Park.

It is very interesting, after an intercourse with a family which for some years has been carried on wholly by letter, with perhaps an occasional interchange of photographs, to be set down suddenly in its midst and become one of it. My stepsister of course came more or less naturally enough to me, for we had been friends when we were young, before I went abroad. Moreover, she requires no learning: she is always complete and the same. But her husband I had never seen, and as for the children (as I thought of them), they were just names and anecdotes and faded *cartes de visite* to me. I, however, thanks to their mother's loyalty, was more to them, for they had been told much about my young days, and I have no doubt that portions at least of my infrequent letters were read aloud as they arrived.

The initial difficulty — by no means a small one — of what I was to be called having been slowly overcome (myself objecting as strongly to the Uncle Kent which they seemed to favour as they did to the Kent pure and simple which I wanted), all went very smoothly, and the family quickly dropped company manners and showed me what it really was. Not that the difference was very marked, but a difference of course there always is — company manners being for the most part a kind of sandpaper that removes the asperities (and occasionally the attractions) of personality.

They are all very affectionate, but at the same time they all have their idiosyncrasies and cherish them.

There are (as one says) two boys and two girls; but the boys are twenty-seven and twenty-five, and the girls twenty-nine and twenty-one. Naomi, the eldest, is the quiet head of the house, for my stepsister has poor health and takes things easily, and it is understood that she must be saved from anxieties and trials. Naomi therefore is the buffer state not only between her mother and the kitchen but between her mother and the world.

Drusilla when I first arrived was a Slade student, a suffragette, and beyond correction or even instruction on any point under the sun. She wore a badge bearing the words "Defiance, not Defence." Drusilla is very pretty, but Naomi, I think, is beautiful. It is, however, Drusilla who wins notice. Naomi's beauty is for a riper judgment, since the better you know her the more beautiful she is.

I thought of Ceres directly I saw her, and the impression grows. If I were an artist I would paint her so. She has the steady level gaze that I think of as that goddess's: she loves all little helpless things, and all little helpless things love her; she leaves nothing quite where it is, but stimulates and nourishes it. And yet to compare Naomi with Ceres is not doing her full justice, for it takes no count of her sympathetic imagination or her readiness for fun. Ceres the goddess, I take it, might have been the dullest woman in real life.

Naomi, although she could not be called clever and certainly is not witty, is so full of what, to save much language, one might call womanliness, and the best womanliness, as to suggest profound sanity. If I had to describe this gift in a single word, I should say acceptivity. Those of us who are born critical and exacting approach nothing quite simply: we disapprove or we approve, and in so doing lose not only time but equanimity. But to Naomi's serene, sane mind the world has to be accepted as it is, and therefore she is always the same. Not that she considers everything perfect, but she has an instinctive realisation of the inevitability of imperfection which keeps her contented — or at any rate prevents querulous discontent.

Naomi's sweet and candid mind, without poring over the matter at all, has, one feels, submitted life and all its phenomena to a reasonable evaluation. She understands: in a word, accepts. It

is indeed a special prerogative of even stupid women to do this simply. The last thing that men learn about women is how transparent and natural they really are in all the essentials, our delay being due largely to our own want of imagination and not a little to the circumstance that we are brought up to expect freakishness, insincerity, and mischief. Proverbial lore, the testimony of so much literature, and the whole tendency of national facetiousness run that way. And yet few intelligent men individually would support it from their own knowledge, and most would say that among their least admirable and most ridiculous moments were those which they had once spent in protecting their wives or sweethearts (to use a better word than fiancées) from possibilities of offence in public places. Women are far nearer nature than men: so near, indeed, that one suspects that the inventor of most of the superficial proprieties was not Mrs. Grundy but her husband.

Naomi has no vocation. The eight years intervening between her birth and that of Drusilla made all the difference, and it is as natural for the elder sister never to have learned, say, typewriting, as it is for the younger to learn painting in Gower Street. But Naomi is by far the busier. She is, indeed, always employed, either indoors or out. She does the shopping, decides the menu, writes most of the letters, engages servants, and pays the calls.

Those are her family duties. Her own tastes

run in the direction of what is called charity, but to them she herself would never give that word. The number of her pensioners (and I might say subjects or worshippers) no one probably will ever know. They are not by any means all in want of material help, the only benefaction she offers beneath many roofs being the bounty of her smile and cheerfulness. She makes a point, for example, of retaining knowledge of the Queen Anne's Gate servants after they leave, which they do only to be married and have fat and happy babies with punctuality and dispatch for Miss Naomi to play with and befriend. There are three such servants at this moment in various parts of London whose babies are visited regularly; but Frank's twins naturally come first. Then there is a hospital at which Naomi attends, and a girls' club of which she is the treasurer; and of course she has a retinue of "chars" and sewing women.

The boys are Frank and Lionel. Frank is the only one that is married, and he lives in a tiny house in Barton Street with his wife and his twins. He is at present a journalist, but all kinds of books are to come from him. Lionel is at the Bar, but not yet has he pleaded a cause, largely, I fancy, on account of the British solicitor's unwillingness to believe in the zeal or capacity of a Middlesex fast scorer (for Lionel plays for that county), and partly because his grandmother's generosity has made it so absurdly possible for Lionel to neglect his duties.

Frank I like immensely, for he is quiet and kind and humorous, but Lionel is more caustic and impatient than one wants, and he is also a shade too voluble upon games. He may be said to live for them; and, as with most men who do so, his yawns come with the dusk. Cricket I too adore, and we have this passion in common; but Lionel is not interested in the past, and that, of course, is where all my cricket lies. He is, however, going to take me to see him play, and I dare say I shall soon learn enough about the new men not to bore him. Into golf I cannot follow him; partly because I have never played, and partly because I like socialism in games, and the idea of employing a caddie will always be unpleasant to me. Lionel naturally cannot accept this point of view, and so few other golfers that I know are able to do so that I have come to the conclusion that the golfing temperament is essentially aristocratic — a feudal inheritance — the property exclusively of those who can see nothing absurd or even degrading in the spectacle of powerful frivolous men being followed by boys of burden.

With my stepsister I was of course quickly at home; but with her husband, Alderley Wynne, K.C., I shall never really be comfortable. Beside his clear, comprehensive, legal, synthetic mind, accustomed to see the end at the same moment that it sees the beginning, generalising swiftly and usually accurately, my intellectual edges appear so very ragged and indistinct, and my hesitancies with regard to right and wrong so

cowardly and anarchical. Moreover, he does not understand how any man can voluntarily expatriate himself except for gain, and I have come back so little better off than I left. Alderley likes a man to make either money or reputation; he is impatient of all who stand still. Stuff must in due course be succeeded by silk in life as well as at the Bar, he holds. I figure as a stationary man, which is only one degree less reprehensible than a retrograde man. None the less, since he is devoted to his wife in a very beautiful, attentive way, and she is fond of me, and I stand for her relation (although I am, of course, no kin to her really), even although his critical judgment tells him that I have failed, his heart and house are open to me.

It is amusing to watch him with his daughters, for although he disapproves of almost every word that Drusilla says, yet his passion for intellectual activity makes him secretly far prouder of her than of Naomi, whom he loves truly enough, but is inclined rather to group with mere creatures of instinct.

Naomi threw out signals of understanding at once and took me under her charge, as I have already shown. You leave it to me, she seemed to say, evidently looking upon me as a foreigner in need of help and instruction at every turn. Unmarried girls of twenty-nine, if they have not grown embittered (as they are too apt to do), can be very administrative and protective. The maternal feeling, I suppose.

With Drusilla, whose blood circulates more in

the brain, I have not hit it off so well, although we are quite friendly. She so clearly looks upon me pityingly as a trifler and in a sense an ignoramus (for I had never even heard of John), and she is not yet old enough to see that England and its needs can perhaps be as well, if not better, studied from abroad than when one is in the midst. The difference between Naomi and Drusilla is that Drusilla asks, Naomi gives. Not the least remarkable thing in this wonderful world in which we grope and have our being, is the amazing differences that can exist in the children of the same parents.

With the exception of Frank, the family seems to be incorrigibly celibate. But of course at every moment lifelong decisions to be single are being overturned, and one never knows. Drusilla now, I feel, might easily follow some such remark as "Please pass the salt" with the statement, made equally coolly, that she was engaged. If so, it would probably be to a Fabian with long hair, a blue flannel collar, and a red tie, or some youthful artist whose genius carries with it a perpetual dispensation from soap and razor. All her friends seem to be young men of these two brands, who like drawing to be ugly and poetry to be Irish. I meet her now and then in St. James's Park with a retinue of them, and we stand on the bridge and exchange views of life for a few moments or draw each other's attention to the light over Whitehall and the colour of London. Then they move off, a little as if they were guests for the Last Supper,

with their brown beards and blue collars, and Drusilla and I walk to Queen Anne's Gate together.

They are all simple good fellows, in spite of their very patent atheisms and nihilisms and solemn vows to be married either without a ceremony at all or in a registry office; but I don't think our little Drusilla is for any of them. For this new comradeship between young men and young women is not making for marriage, especially among the bisexual, as to a certain extent most artists and revolutionaries are.

One other member the family may be said to have: Mr. Adolphus — or Dollie — Heathcote, an articled pupil of Alderley's who is continually dropping in in the evening and is on the best terms with himself and every one: a very agreeable ornamental person. When it was the fashion to present me with contributions of furniture or knick-knacks for my rooms, Dollie, who seems to have an infallible scent for everything that is, in his own phrase, dodgy, and who lights his cigarettes with a pocket spirit-lamp that would not be out of place in the *Arabian Nights*, gave me a clock on a new design which dispenses with a dial but records the hours and minutes on little numbered labels. These labels are flipped away by an invisible agency one by one as they expire, and are for one's comfort almost too much like performers in a sombre moral drama illustrating the flight of time and the approach of annihilation. Dollie, however, I am sure has no such thoughts. "A top-hole idea," he called it.

CHAPTER III

THE HAUNTS OF MEN REVISITED AND THE FIRST BEMERTONIAN NUGGET

MY first few days over Bemerton's were a dream of joy and liberty. I am happy enough still (my nature is happy), but in those first few days I was realising the desire of half a lifetime — I was in the dovecote, so to speak, that all my thoughts had been homing to, day and night, for years and years.

How often had I awakened and lain awake for hours, powerless to sleep again with all London in my head — not only its sights and sounds but the scents of it. Latterly, when the date of my release was fixed and grew nearer, this small-hour excitement had so intensified that I began to fear brain-fever, and indeed at the end nothing but drugs had saved me; but the voyage put things right: once again the sea washed away — as who says? is it not Lucretius? — the ills of man.

At my stepsister's I was in a kind of trance. It was all so strange and unreal, and also there, even if subconsciously, I played the voluptuary, the

epicure, and postponed the true rapture to the last, thinking that I would not begin to realise all the best anticipations until my rooms were my own — until once again I was my own master, as one never is in any one else's house. Dreams of London liberty that were dreamed alone should be realised alone; and so, although Naomi and I went everywhere, and I tasted many of the pleasures I had meditated upon, there was, as it were, a veil between them and my sensorium, not to be lifted until I was free once more and the obligations of a grateful guest were removed. Dear Naomi, I think, understood, and hastened accordingly in her search for rooms.

At first this perfect irresponsibility in my city of delight was almost too much: I was in danger of another breakdown. Sleep I could not. I roamed London from west to east, from south to north. I drifted wherever the impulse took me. I was intoxicated with humanity — bemused by people. I stood for hours on the bridges watching the tugs and the barges. I stood for hours in Farringdon Street at this barrow and that.

I had no method: I boarded buses for the docks, and never got beyond the stalls of Butchers' Row. I set out in the morning for Highgate, and by evening was still in the Charing Cross Road. I accepted invitations to dinner, and what time the entrée was being served I might be seen through the steam of sausage and mashed dining in a small eating-house. I started to pay calls on old friends, and wandered to the National Gallery. I read

the advertisements of the best plays, and found myself in the Middlesex. I meditated Hampstead Heath, and instead inhaled invigorating draughts of naphtha in the New Cut. I bought a ticket for Queen's Hall, and allowed a melodrama in the Mile End Road to play fast and loose with my emotions.

But I had my disappointments too. It was too often not the London of my dreams. My dreams had taken no account of change. The Piccadilly I had visualised so long and so longingly was the Piccadilly of 1875 — how different from this! My Strand was a Strand on which no County Council had wreaked its zeal. One of my favourite haunts as a youth had been Clare Market — that Hogarthian oasis — and Clare Market has passed for ever; and who can lay his hand upon his heart and say that the Charing Cross Road is any real substitute for the street of Holy Well? That that area was insanitary and is better away has nothing to do with it. The true Londoner cares no straw for sanitation. He thrives on ill conditions.

I swear to you that through my heaven blow pungent clouds of sulphurous metropolitan smoke — such as we breathed in perfection years ago between Portland Road and King's Cross and between Blackfriars and Charing Cross. Where are they now? The higher slopes of Snowdon are hardly more free from grime than the ladylike highway into which electricity has converted the underground.

London's other new means of rapid transit were a disappointment too. We have motor cars in Buenos Ayres, but I was not prepared for such a capture of the streets as I found. For how many nights before I came away did coloured omnibuses in full sail fill my dreams in irresistible onset! That was London. The motor bus has its onset too, but it has none of the old rollick. It comes rigidly towards you, immense and terrifying. It does not sway nor roll. It wears the inflexible, pitiless air of progress. It is Juggernaut. How human and genial was the bus!

But among all the London phantasmagoria that had flickered before my sleeping and waking and dozing eyes the hansom cab was, I think, the most constant. I used to hear the horse's bell. . . . I had never forgotten my first hansom ride. Does any one forget it? My next — my second first hansom ride, so to say — was to be as memorable. I thought about it absurdly. I remembered the sense of comfort with which one settled down into the seat and closed the flaps and then composed oneself to watch London unfold. . . . But I found the motor cab the master of the streets. The hansom was still there, but not the hansom that I had known. The dashing driver was gone, the knowing fellow with a straw in his mouth, and a coat with large buttons, and a raffish tall hat on the side of his head. The hansom driver to-day is more like the growler driver of the past: a beaten man. I am sorry for him, and so long as I am not in a hurry

I will climb into his vehicle as of old — that is, until it disappears, as I suppose it must. And what then? In my youth old hansoms when they died went to Oxford. Where will they go to-day?

But, when all is said, the London that one most desired in such an exile as mine was the London of winter. London on a fine November evening at, say, six o'clock, after Christmas has been signalled, when there is an edge on the air and an indigo mist in the streets and the shops are all lighted. The return home to a bright fire under these conditions, with the evening paper or a new book or magazine! It was a simple ideal, but it carried extraordinary comfort and satisfaction with it.

Slippers . . .

I used to meditate on it for hours.

What a deal of pleasant undress repose must be missed by the fashionable! How poor an exchange are dress boots for soft slippers, a stall for an arm-chair, and (I myself would add) a play for a book!

That reminds me that I must tell you about my first Bemerton purchase, the Chinese Biographical Dictionary. Mr. Bemerton was right: it is a treasure. I only nibbled at it at first, opening at random and reading a life here and there — there are 2,579 lives in it altogether — and I was never disappointed. And then I began to take it seriously, and now I know something of its merits and for awhile am measuring mankind by a Chinese standard.

It is the model of biographical dictionaries. I have long possessed our own *Dictionary of National Biography*, in how many weighty volumes? Sixty-two, including the *Errata;* but after the dry, epigrammatic conciseness of Dr. Giles it is unreadable. To this sage appraiser of Chinese genius and address all meritorious men come alike — whether statesmen, cynics, sorcerers, or saints. He never questions: he merely puts on record in brief credulous sentences their characters and deeds. When all is said, it is, I suppose, their imperturbability and saturnine humour that are the most engaging qualities of the Chinese. They could not have found a better celebrant, or one more in tune with themselves, than Dr. Giles. He sets down everything gravely, and is as kind to the supernatural as to the natural. The sole qualification for admission into the Gilesian Valhalla is merit.

The book's brevity is its great charm. It was Henri Taine, I think, who said that there was no volume he could not compress into a chapter, and no chapter that would not go into a sentence. Dr. Giles has carried out Taine's thrasonical brag. There is no Chinese lifetime, however crowded and illustrious, that he cannot pack into a paragraph or a page. Nor does anything strike one as wanting. One could do with more, of course, and yet who would have the olive larger? There is no blemish on this work save its prohibitive weight as a bed book, and that I have overcome by cutting it into four pamphlets.

I find a disdain for worldly advantage among these pagan Celestial philosophers that makes a more reasonable ideal for some of our Western plutocrats to-day than many that are placed before them in the professional pulpit. A few Englishmen have had a similar whimsical unworldliness, but they are few and far between. I imagine that J. K. Stephen had, for one, and the Shelley that emerges from certain of Hogg's pages. A glittering example of the humorous romantic detachment and carelessness of public opinion that I mean is Chang Chih-ho, of the eighth century A.D., who spent his time in angling, but used no bait, his object not being to catch fish. When Lu Yü asked him why he roamed about, Chang's answer was instant: "With the Empyrean as my home, the bright moon my constant companion, and the four seas my inseparable friends — what mean you by *roaming?*" and when a friend offered him a comfortable home instead of his poor boat, he replied, "I prefer to follow the gulls into cloudland rather than bury my ethereal self beneath the dust of the world." Isn't that fine?

There should certainly be a Chang Chih-ho Society. The spread of such roseate impracticableness would do no harm at all. Indeed, the crying need for the moment in this country, as in America, is a gospel of poverty to cope with the gospel of riches that is vitiating society. Sufficient exemplars for preachers of this new evangel could probably be found in Dr. Giles's pages alone, but if others were needed there is

always the wise and silent India in reserve. Yang Ksiung, a poet of the first century B.C. (note the period), would be one high among them. On the completion of Yang's most famous work, "a wealthy merchant of the province was so struck by its excellence that he offered to give 100,000 *cash* if his name should merely be mentioned in it. But Yang answered with scorn that a stag in a pen or an ox in a cage would not be more out of place than the name of a man with nothing but money to recommend him in the sacred pages of a book."

Another recluse, Cháo Fu, who flourished B.C. 2,357, took to the branches of the trees to be removed as far as possible from contact with the world. "Yao offered him the throne, but he declined and immediately went and washed his ears to free them from the defilement of such worldly contamination," nor would he let his calves drink of the water.

Not the least interesting and instructive thing about this work is its record of virtue, genius, and fortitude of not only a non-Christian people but to a large extent, as we understand it, a non-civilised people.

Another eminent pagan was Chang Chēn-chou, of the seventh century A.D., who, on being appointed Governor of Shu-chou, "proceeded to his old home and spent ten days in feasting his relatives and friends. Then calling them together, he gave to each a present of money and silk, and took leave of them with tears in his eyes, saying,

'We have had this pleasant time together as old friends. To-morrow I take up my appointment as Governor; after that we can meet no more.' The result was an impartial and successful administration."

Of Chēn Shih, A.D. 104–187, who was also famous for his probity, a pleasant story is told. On one occasion "when a thief had hidden himself among the roof-beams, he quietly called together his sons and grandsons, and after a short moral lecture pointed up at the thief, saying, 'Do not imitate this gentleman on the beam.' The latter was so touched that he came down and asked forgiveness, promising to lead an honest life for the future, and departing joyfully with a present of money."

Another sage was Sun Fang, of the twelfth century A.D., an Imperial physician, who called himself the Hermit of the Four Stops. He explained this to mean that when he had taken his fill of plain food, he stopped; when he had put on enough plain clothes to keep himself warm, he stopped; when he had realised a fair proportion of his wishes, he stopped; and finally, after growing old, free from covetousness or envy, he would also be prepared to stop.

With him may be coupled Ping Chi, who died B.C. 55, at the time that our tight little island was being invaded by the Romans. "In 63 he was ennobled as Marquis, and in 59 became Minister of State. The following story is told of his acumen. One spring day he came upon a crowd of brawlers,

among whom were several killed and wounded; but he took no notice of them and passed on. Soon afterwards he saw an ox panting violently, and at once showed the greatest concern. 'For,' as he explained, 'the brawlers can be left to those whose business it is to deal with such matters; whereas an ox panting in spring means that heat has come before its time, and that the seasons are out of joint, thus opening a question of the deepest national interest.'"

Among the philosophers I like Yin Hao, who, when he failed to grapple with the rebellion of Yao Hsiang, was impeached for incompetence and cashiered. "He took his punishment without complaint, except that he spent his days in writing with his finger in the air the four words 'Oh! oh! strange business!'" Sang Wei-han had philosophy of another kind: "He was short of stature, with a long beard; but used to stand before a mirror and say, 'One foot of face is worth seven of body.' At the same time, he was so hideously ugly that the very sight of him made people sweat, even in mid-winter."

Chinese thoroughness is also worth some attention in the West. Look at Chi Cháng. Chi Cháng was an archer who arrived at proficiency by painful measures. "He began by lying for three years under his wife's loom, in order to learn not to blush. He then hung up a louse, and gazed at it for three years, until at length it appeared to him as big as a cart-wheel. After this, he is said to have been able to pierce through

the heart with an arrow." Another conscientious model was Liu Hsün, who died A.D. 521, and "who read all night, having a lighted twist of hemp arranged in such a way as to burn his hair if he began to nod from drowsiness."

Chang I, who died B.C. 310, a political adventurer, and eventually Prime Minister, had a certain dry humour. "It is recorded that in his early life, after a banquet at the house of a Minister of Ch'u, at which he had been present, he was wrongly accused of stealing some valuable gem, and was very severely beaten. On his return home, he said to his wife, 'Look and see if they have left me my tongue.' And when his wife declared that it was safe and sound, he cried out, 'If I still have my tongue, that is all I want.'"

Here is humour again: Tung-fang So, a censor in the first century B.C., "on one occasion drank off some elixir of immortality which belonged to the Emperor, and the latter in a rage ordered him to be put to death. But Tung-fang So smiled and said, 'If the elixir was genuine, your Majesty can do me no harm; if it was not, what harm have I done?'"

Of Chao Kao, who died B.C. 207, a famous rebel, we have this sinister variant of Andersen's story of the Emperor's new clothes: "Tradition says that on one occasion, in order to discover which of the officials at the Court of Hu Hai, the Second Emperor, would be likely to defy him, he presented the Emperor with a stag, saying that it

was a horse. His Majesty, bewildered by the absurdity of the statement, appealed to his surrounding courtiers. Those who were bold enough to say that it was a stag were marked down by Chao Kao for destruction."

Are they not an interesting company? Let me end this taste by the celebration of one of the most attractive of all — Ch'ĕn Tsun. Ch'ĕn Tsun, who died A.D. 25, was distinguished as a letter-writer, but still more famous for his love of good company. That, however, is nothing: the characteristic that fills me with pleasure is the following: "He used to keep his guests with him, even against their will, by throwing the linch-pins of their carriages into a well." What a delightful trait — or, rather, habit!

CHAPTER IV

DESCRIBING MR. AND MRS. DUCKIE, ALF PINTO, BEATRICE, AND ERN

MRS. DUCKIE has only one fault. Her virtues are many, chief among them an almost fervid cleanliness, displaying itself in the spotlessness of the rooms and an affection for fresh towels that is Continental — certainly very un-English. She believes, too, in open windows, to a point inconceivable in a retired cook.

But she has a fault, and that is talkativeness — more than talkativeness, for she spins a kind of gummy web of words from which the listener, unless he is more ruthless than I can be, has the greatest difficulty in disentangling himself. The law of association governing her mind, as it does that of so many feminine talkers, one thing leads to another. To me, who have nothing to do — who am out, so to speak, for no other purpose than to occupy a stall in the theatre of life and watch the play — this does not matter very much, and I have already learned the trick of listening

with one ear only, and making by a natural reflex action the expected sounds due from common politeness; but I can imagine it driving another and busier man mad, and I wonder what Mr. Dabney's short way with her is.

Mrs. Duckie's family consists of three children and a husband. They are quite prosperous, for two of the children, now grown up, keep themselves, and Mr. Duckie does well enough as head waiter in a Fleet Street chop house of the old type. The eldest son indeed more than keeps himself, for he has latterly become a celebrity and earns the income of at least an Under Secretary — almost that of the President of the Local Government Board, to whom I have no doubt he has in his time made many successful sarcastic allusions. For Herbert Duckie (to give him his baptismal name) is a music-hall singer.

The mild syllables uttered over the child by the curate at the font some five-and-twenty years ago are, however, unknown to London, on whose placards Herbert Duckie figures more provocatively as Alf Pinto. Of this pseudonym his mother is rightly proud, for there is more in it than meets the casual eye. Much thought went to its architecture, Alf standing not only for an abbreviation of Alfred, but signifying also a moiety, and Pinto being pronounced humorously by the initiate with the "i" long — thus convivially suggesting a measure of the national beverage. The joke is not original, I fear, for I remember it in

a delightful travesty of poor Ouida; but it seems to have been genuinely evolved afresh by young Duckie and his friends.

His father and mother are naturally proud of him, for in addition to his fame and his considerable salary, he has the kindly filial habit of driving up to the house on fine Sunday afternoons in a dogcart and taking some of the family noticeably in it to Epping, or the Welsh Harp, or Richmond.

Mrs. Duckie's attitude to her gifted son is reverential and wondering. She is proud of his shining gifts and success, and perplexed at his possession of them; although, as she says, it comes from her side, grandfather being that musical, and her Uncle Will a terrible one to notice and make jokes.

How true it is that honour can come from our friends quite as much as from our personal attainments — often, perhaps, more. Dollie Heathcote, I feel sure, has hitherto looked upon me as a harmless old buffer, hopelessly out of date, but amiable enough, and possibly a person to be conciliated in view of my kinship with his chosen family. But when one evening at dinner I asked him casually if he knew Alf Pinto, respect for me began to grow, and when I went on to say that I had met Alf Pinto and conversed with him, he was at my feet.

"Not *the* Alf Pinto?" he said. "Not the man who sings 'He isn't so pleased as he was'?"

"The same," I said.

He asked me feverishly how I knew him, but I am not quite so green as that. If I told Dollie that Alf Pinto was my landlady's son, all, or nearly all, the gilt would be off the gingerbread. So I made a mystery of it, and the young gentleman went off to a dance baffled but still reverent.

He did not, however, go before we had arranged an evening together at the Frivoli to hear Alf and other stars; and also not before I was able to enlighten him as to the true esoteric pronunciation of Alf's name.

"I notice," I said, "that you call him Alf Pĭnto. Isn't that rather a confession of weakness on your part? I thought you were in the very innermost and most knowledgable know."

Dollie looked — for him — abashed. "Why, what do you mean?" he asked.

I then explained the mystery.

"By Jove!" said Dollie, "that's clever! It's one of the dodgiest things I ever heard. 'Alf Pīnto'! Ripping!"

He went away in a taxi, rolling the morsel of wit on his appreciative tongue.

The other Duckie children are Beatrice and Ern. Beatrice is twenty-two; Ern is thirteen. Beatrice is also connected with the footlights, being dresser to Miss Azure Verity, the actress who is just now drawing all London (as we say) to the Princess's to see her in the part of Selma Origen in Mr. Operin's new play.

I sometimes wonder what Mrs. Duckie would make of Browning's lines —

> "Dante once prepared to paint an angel:
> Whom to please? You whisper 'Beatrice'" —

for to her proud maternal tongue this beautiful name is a dissyllable — Be-trice; and of Be-trice's intimacy with Miss Verity I hear much every morning, together with quotations from that lady's conversation, and tales of her successes with society.

Be-trice also, I find, has abandoned her patronymic. In the profession to which she belongs so completely as to feel entitled to refer to our leading actresses by their last names only — on the first occasion on which we met, she spoke casually of Terry, thereby meaning, to my horror and shame, the incomparable Ellen — in that profession Be-trice is not known as Miss Duckie but as Miss Lestrange.

As for Ern, he is a healthy young London boy, with all its scepticism and slang at his fingers' ends. Mrs. Duckie wants him to be a civil engineer: Mr. Duckie believes in trade, and fancies among trades none so much as that of the butcher. "An engineer," says Mrs. Duckie, "is more gentlemanly." "But," says Mr. Duckie, speaking with experience, "whatever happens, people must eat; the last thing they give up is their victuals. No doubt," he says, "engineering is useful; but look at the money it costs to learn it, and look at the competition afterwards. Whereas I can get the boy into a first-class butcher's

to-morrow, and what's more, I can be of use to him myself. How could I help him in his engineering? But though I say it as shouldn't, there isn't a better judge of a steak, point or rump, or a chop, mutton or pork, than me in London."

Ern himself, I need hardly say, is opposed to both callings. At present he has but one ambition, and that is to be a shover. His only real employment so far has been parcel-packing for Mr. Bemerton on the few days each month following the publication of his catalogue. Great days downstairs, I can tell you, and sometimes twenty telegrams in a morning.

I have now described all the fauna of Bemerton's except one — the waterman — who, however, does not come indoors but lends redolence to the exterior. The waterman tends the cab rank and incidentally runs errands for the neighbourhood. London is rich in such wastrels, whose career is all behind them. They have no doubt begun reputably enough in this or that trade, drifted into the drink habit, and steadily filed through one employ after another until they have nothing left but the street corner when they are out of pence, and the public bar when pence come their way.

This man alternately drinks and shivers. His clothes are thin useless things in which he wraps himself. He stands at the corner and beats his arms; looks up each street; walks a few steps; exchanges the time of day with a cabman;

and disappears into the "Goat and Compasses" again.

One of the enduring problems to the social observer is, Where do poor men find so much money for beer? When it comes to that, I suppose that the basic question of civilised life is, How on earth can the Blanks afford to live as they do? But the riches of the poor are only a little less astonishing than the riches of one's neighbours. This man seems to be dependent for his earnings on the good-nature of a few cabmen and very infrequent employment by the residents of the neighbourhood. I, for example, have given him odd tips for fetching me taximeter cabs. And yet he seems rarely to want the means to realise his one remaining and — considering how little he can have to remember with joy, I must confess — exceedingly reasonable ambition, which is to keep fuddled. When all is said against alcohol, there remains the unassailable fact that it is the poor man's best accessible anodyne. The poet's line —

"Let us be drunk and for a while forget,"

contains the whole philosophy of intoxication.

Possibly the landlord of the "God encompasseth" is lenient with him in the matter of payment, for the waterman is certainly the cause of much forgetting in others. For with all his ruined air and deplorable condition he seems to be a companionable man. He has popularity in his way. Men at work he watches with extraordinary intel-

ligence and camaraderie: no robin by a wood-shed does it better. And he seems to know what to say to them. When the road was up for new electric wires, he was the life and soul of the party. I should not be surprised if he was the best after-breakfast talker in London.

He is always cold and manifestly a sick man; but he has that wonderful gift of the London idler of never being so ill that it is necessary to stay at home. Home, do I say? It is a word which, we are too often told, the English have and the French, to their eternal loss, have not; but I should not like to see the inside of the waterman's sanctuary. It is perhaps wiser to be careful how we pity the French. I have seen his wife: for she brings him dinner in a bowl — a dispirited, broken woman. But his children? It is too horrible a thought.

CHAPTER V

MR. DABNEY OF *THE BALANCE* LETS HIMSELF GO

I HAD not long been over Bemerton's when Mrs. Duckie knocked at the door to ask if Mr. Dabney, the gentleman upstairs, the gentleman on the press, might have a few words with me.

Of course I said yes, and in a minute or so he came in — a man of the ordinary age in London just now, clean shaved, with prematurely grey hair, a slightly discontented expression, and a sensitive, critical mouth.

He made the usual apologies that a well-bred man makes to a stranger with whom he intends to be friendly, and attributed his visit to a remark of Mrs. Duckie's to the effect that I had been living in Buenos Ayres since 1875 and had only just returned. "It seemed to me," he added, "that to an observant man London and the English generally must after so long an exile present many changes, and I thought you would perhaps allow me to ask you a few ques-

tions about your impressions for an article in my paper."

I said that provided my name was not mentioned I had no objection whatever, although I doubted, &c. &c.; but I might, as it happened, have spared myself that excursion into conventional false modesty, for I soon found that Mr. Dabney had no real intention of interviewing me at all, but only wanted the stimulus of my experience, or the excuse of my mere existence, to interview himself. As he talked on I wondered if that is the way that all interviews by the more capable and thoughtful journalists are done. May be.

His paper, it seems, is *The Balance*, a weekly critical review which he runs almost single-handed ("Everything that means anything," he says, "is done by one man"), the financial backing coming from a source which he said he was not in a position to reveal, to me or indeed to any one. *The Balance* has a circulation of less than two thousand; but, as Mr. Dabney says, every one who counts has to read it. Its aim is to be sane, impartial, and fearless (the aim of all of us), and Mr. Dabney really believes that it achieves this end; but his mind, I should say, with all its vigour and acumen, though naturally inclined to justice and courage, is about as capable of impartiality as a prize-fighter is capable of metaphysics.

None the less, Mr. Dabney's paper, which I have since studied carefully, makes the right effort, and it comes as a corrective to the party

organs that can see no good in any Bill brought forward by the other side at any time, and particularly so when it chances to be a measure promised vaguely by their own.

It is one of the least satisfactory thoughts that come to a reader of the papers that so many men with the gift of expressing themselves well and seeing fairly clearly into things should be so willing to adapt their intellects to the party machine. We are all, of course, born, as the poet says, Liberal or Conservative; but from journalists one expects a rather more complex psychology. We look to journalists to see a little farther not only into the future but also into the past than ordinary persons. Unhappily in England just now, as I remarked to Mr. Dabney, thus incurring his most vitriolic agreement, the type of journalist who seems to have most readers is permitted to be the least sagacious and the least independent.

Mr. Dabney is by nature a pessimist — so much so that one wonders what he would do if any of the reforms he desires were to come into force. He is one of those eloquent and clear-sighted men who must be in revolt to be articulate and well-directed. He was for a long time leader-writer on a daily paper, but gradually found himself more and more irked by the necessity of expressing not his own views but his editor's. At last, unable to bear it any longer, he retired. The circumstance was recorded in the press in a paragraph in the ordinary way, and the very next

day Mr. Dabney received a letter from a stranger asking him to prepare an estimate of the cost of a weekly journal that should represent his own views and contain also a sufficiency of acceptable various matter. He did so, on the most disadvantageous scale that even his pessimism could devise, and the next day he received a cheque for the first year's expenses and instructions to begin at once. Under such unworldly conditions was *The Balance* born.

"You say you left England in 1875," Mr. Dabney began. "Then you are now in a position to observe some very curious developments, for the changes in London alone since that date have been extraordinary. Our whole character seems to have undergone a revolution. We used to be economical, home-keeping: we have become gad-abouts, pleasure-hunters. We pour our money into the hands of entertainers and restaurateurs. Remember, I speak of London. To what extent England resembles London I am not in a position to say. But London becomes daily more hedonistic, more atheistic. Plain living and high thinking are discredited. High living and low thinking have it all to themselves."

Mr. Dabney spoke with concentrated fury, through his teeth, as if I were the primary cause of this calamity. I believe that of all uncomfortable conversationalists (and the world is full of them) the most uncomfortable are those who would convert you to your own way of thinking. This is Mr. Dabney's weakness: he

conceives of all his interlocutors as heretics and antagonists.

"But to what," I asked him, "do you attribute this effect?"

"To too long a period of prosperity; to peace; and" — he almost spat the words from him — "to the modern press. The new journalism may not have produced it, but it has fostered it. Since you left England there has sprung up a totally new press — a press that does not dictate but flatters; that finds out what the mob wants and gives it them. A press without any mind — nothing but an infernal instinct for success. A press in the hands of young men in a hurry, without knowledge, experience, or conviction. Opportunists, improvisers, cynics."

"But surely there are good papers too?"

"One or two. But it is those others that have the public ear. They are the true organs of the democracy."

"And yet," I said, "at the last General Election did not these popular papers lose almost every seat?"

"Ah!" he said, "that is so. But that is not, I fear, any proof of their want of influence generally. Political changes are deeper than that. The mob is moved politically never by opinions but always by personality. We don't in England vote for Liberals or Conservatives: we vote for men. Sentiment controls us. We vote for one man because we are sorry for him; for another, because we once met him somewhere and he was very

pleasant; for another, because his father's horse won the Derby; for another, because his opponent is So-and-so whom we detest. In England we never accept any one as a simple fellow-creature: we must always fix not only an adjective upon him but some personal feeling. That is why papers lose their influence when elections are on. But at other times they can be steadily operative for good or bad; they can vulgarise all they touch or dignify it. The new press vulgarises. Its gods are false. It knows no shame. When found out, it slavers. When chastised, it says, How charmingly you use the whip."

Mr. Dabney was now happy. His face shone — it might have been with the reflected glow of his molten words. He was the Savonarola of Fleet Street.

"Cynicism," he went on, "is not the only fault. A gross sensuality has also come upon us. A journalist should be something of an ascetic, a recluse: an observer from without. He should not be in the social machine; he should not know every one. How can you keep your hands clean if you know every one? His dress suit should be rusty; one cannot dine out without consuming salt, and by salt are we captured. Journalists now eat too much and too well. It was a bad day for England when a journalist first ate a plover's egg."

"Journalists, in short," I said, "should live over Bemerton's."

He grunted a short acknowledgment of my

mild humour, and continued: "Every nation, according to Arnold, has the papers it deserves. That is true. The greater part of this nation, suffering just now from swelled head and swelled stomach and swelled pockets, has the paper it deserves. Cynicism and self-esteem run through everything. Christian of course we never were, and never shall be, not even in adversity; but we are no longer in the least afraid of God. We are getting nasty, too. We buy messy little indecent novels by the thousand, as far removed from honest British coarseness as the poles are asunder. We have given up respecting the Bible.

"I will give you an instance of our new cynicism, our carelessness. The other day, at one of the large music halls, a dancer appeared nightly in nothing whatever but a skirt of beads, and capered as provocatively as she was able round a waxen head. The dancer affected to be Salome, the daughter of Herodias, while the waxen head was intended for that of the decapitated John the Baptist, the forerunner, if I remember aright, of our Lord. This in a London music hall! The exhibition rapidly became the rage, and several other halls, in the usual slavish imitative way, had their Salomes too. Every one went to see and applaud the principal one, including the Prime Minister, who subsequently, to mark his especial approval, entertained the lady at 10 Downing Street. So far as I could discover, I, who am a professed sceptic, was practically the only person in London whose feelings were

outraged. I call the incident deplorably significant.

"It seemed to me," Mr. Dabney continued, "sufficiently offensive that a sacred figure such as John the Baptist — a figure of peculiar sanctity to Christians — should be subjected to the indignity of taking part in a music-hall performance at all, amid knockabouts and comic singers and all the other seaminesses of those places; but it was far worse that English people of high position should flock to see it. For any head, you must see, would have done as well. The girl had to dance more or less naked to some waxwork property: that we will take for granted. Then why not the head, say, of Holofernes, who is only in the *Apocrypha?* The spectacle might then have drawn merely the Leader of the Opposition, but it should have served."

Mr. Dabney smiled a ghastly smile as he made his final joke and paused for breath.

"Were there no protests at all?" I asked.

"There may have been a few," he said: "I was exaggerating a little; but very few. Where were they to appear? A press that lives largely by advertisements does not lightly advise people to stay away from places of entertainment. Do you know," he added, "that my paper is the only paper in London that does not take advertisements. So long as there are advertisements there cannot be absolutely free speech. It is not humanly possible.

"You may say," he went on (but I had said

nothing of the kind. I had, as a matter of fact, hardly opened my mouth: he had given me no chance). "You may say," he went on, "that we are not more cynical now than we were in the days of the Regency. True, perhaps. But that is what makes it so serious. Because since the Regency we have had eighty years or so of seriousness and steady improvement — the Victorian Era, with its fine political and intellectual and religious activity, its Reform Bill, its Tractarian movement, its Dickens and Carlyle, its Browning and Ruskin, its awakening to new ideas. To-day we are steadily going back on all that. We believe only in pleasure and success: our one ideal is wealth."

"Well," I said, for I was getting a little tired, and perhaps I was a little piqued too at the turn the "interview" had taken, "and what is the remedy for all this evil?"

"War," he said. "Nothing more or less. A bloody war — not a punitive expedition or 'a sort of a war'" (he quoted these words with white fury). "That might get us right again."

"At great cost," I said.

"A surgical operation," he replied, "if the only means of saving life, cannot be called expensive."

"But supposing we went under?"

"If we did, it would be better so. Then we should begin again in a new spirit. Loss would be gain."

"A very dreadful form of cure," I said.

"True. But not more dreadful than the decay that comes from complacency. A nation fight-

ing for its life makes for me a finer spectacle than a nation overeating at a banquet.

"The most sacred and valuable treasure that the English have lost," he went on more gravely, "is the capacity for self-denial. The old figure of John Bull was never to my mind admirable. He not only looked too secure in his own wealth and rectitude but too apoplectic. But he was a better national symbol for the English than the new John Bull that one would have to draw now were one a satirical artist with critical vision — a John Bull more like a Maida Vale Jew. John Bull grows materialistic and sensual. An anxious war would mend that. Set him fighting for very existence, and you will bring out his good qualities again."

"I don't agree with you," I said, "about war. Its horrors are too horrible. What I think we want is a saint."

"You won't get one," said Mr. Dabney, "and besides, every saint has a bee in his halo."

"I don't know that that matters," said I. "It is the bees that do the work. The bee is often the most original part of the man's brain, just as the skeleton is often the only really living thing in the family's cupboard. Most people are dead.

"The saint," I went on, "that England needs is a saint of extraordinary personal magnetism — a saint (as I see it dimly) whom our young men and women will follow in enthusiastic ecstasy; a saint ——"

"A counsel of perfection," Mr. Dabney interrupted. "Will your saint begin as a curate?"

he inquired icily. "Remember that a pulpit engaged in the struggle for existence is doomed as a friend. The Church to-day is too much represented by angry casuists in the Commons and anxious fathers of families in the vicarages; while Nonconformity has become largely the preserve of astute and prosperous journalists. One listens in vain for the unworldly voice.

"The most successful revival of our time," he continued, "had to be put frankly upon a gross material basis before it had a chance — General Booth's progress as a social ameliorator being marked by heartiness, shrewdness, and humour, much more than by any beauty of holiness; while it is free from any suggestion of pure sacrifice, since the *quid* offered for the *quo* is so splendid — happiness here and an everlasting crown to follow, in exchange for giving up merely a few oaths, merely a few debauches, merely a few blows on a wife's body.

"England," he continued, "is still full of conscience, as it always will be; but its activities have of late become more and more altruistic. It is our neighbours that we have become so careful for, rather than ourselves. We spend hours in Boulter's Lock on Sundays meditating on the wisdom of keeping weaker vessels out of exhibitions on that day, and statesmen solve knotty points of the Licensing Bill over champagne at their clubs. Virtue we still consider the best goal for others: but for ourselves, success. Success is the new god, and will be, I suppose, for

some time yet, so zealously is the altar flame guarded.

"I think your plea for a saint is very charming, but I don't believe in it. I don't think the English would know what to do with a saint if they found one. Wales might, and Ireland might, but not England. A saint, to work any kind of effect, must have an emotional, self-forgetting material to work upon. There is very little here. Sentiment we have, but not emotion. And we are too much afraid of the ridicule of the people next door.

"I have often amused myself by speculating on the probable reception that Christ would have were he now to appear in London. A character sketch expressing the profoundest admiration in *The Daily Mail;* his portrait in *The Daily Mirror,* probably beside that of public men whom he more or less resembled; a guarded leader in *The Church Times;* and in *The British Weekly* an appeal to Nonconformists not to lose their heads — yet — not until a little more was known.

"But now tell me," said Mr. Dabney, "what you have observed yourself. For it seems to me I have done most of the talking."

"Oh," I said, "my observations have not been so profound as yours. I have merely walked about the streets and seen the surface of things. Of that kind," I said, "the most noticeable change that has struck me — although it may, in common with all my other impressions, be sheer illusion — is the increase of sarcastic facetiousness. London

has always, I imagine, indulged in this disguise of its real feelings — this armour, one might almost say, against fate — but the habit seems to be more diffused than I remembered. I think I discern also an increase of genuine cynicism, as indeed you have said — cynicism rather than pessimism, I should say; by cynicism meaning a natural acceptance of the ills of life without grumbling at them. The frame of mind comes, I suppose with you, largely from irreligion, materialism; but it has been fostered, no doubt, by the English climate. Not that the English climate has changed, but the English people, in their increased love of pleasure and pursuit of it, have come to think more of fine weather than they did, and not finding it, have acquired a new bitterness. So at least it amuses me to fancy. For the increased love of pleasure is visible on every side."

Mr. Dabney agreed — very heartily, considering how little disapproval there was in my voice. As he seemed in danger of resuming his eager and caustic monologue, I hastily went on to say that I also agreed in the main with him, but was disposed to think that the worst of the case was confined to London and that the great heart of the country was not cankered. "And even in London," I added, "I have noticed as I walked about quite a number of kindly deeds, indicating that good-heartedness and thought for others are still powerful here. I watch your fine fury that such things can be," I added, "and I hear of preachers lamenting the wickedness of the world;

but I cannot share either passion. My wonder is that people are so good. I think that the courage and endurance and optimism of human beings are amazing. Nothing is done for them: the brave hopefulness with which they rise morning after morning is dashed by noon; but still they go on, doing their best. And the more sceptical we grow, surely the more is it to our credit to be brave and decent."

CHAPTER VI

MR. BEMERTON CONFERS UPON ME THE FREEDOM OF HIS TREASURY

I TOOK an early opportunity of visiting Mr. Bemerton and introducing myself: not a difficult task with the Chinese treasure as a lever, while the way had been, of course, further paved by Mrs. Duckie, who, like most London matrons of her class, could pave the way to anything.

Mr. Bemerton is a kind-looking man of about sixty, a bachelor. He is very short, clean-shaven, with silver-rimmed spectacles and white hair. An alert and contented man. He has been in the second-hand book business, he tells me, all his life, having begun as an errand boy at Sotheby's. He set up for himself thirty years ago, and has done well enough, never rising quite to a first folio nor descending much to remainders, but maintaining a steady mean between these two extremes. He has probably never read through a whole volume in his life; but he knows something about most. He has a knack of dipping

which had he been born an author instead of a bookseller might have made his fortune as a popular scholar and even now would qualify him for a librarianship almost anywhere. Libraries, however, he does not much esteem. People should own their books, he holds; but that, of course, is a counsel of perfection, or would be were it not for the multitude of reprints that are now to be had at the price of a cigar.

Mr. Bemerton's only sign of impatience or intolerance is displayed when he is reminded by customers of the cheapness of the modern reprint; but I must do him the justice to explain that it is not for an instant the result of any commercial self-protection on his part, for his soul is without clay, but the genuine distaste of the born explorer for a well-mapped country. What can become of book-hunting, he asks, if everything is reprinted in uniform binding for a shilling or sixpence? He does not often make an epigram — his mind is too candid — but he came near it when he said the other day that the test of a good book was that it was not reprintable in any series. "Let us pray," he said, "that the best things continue to drop through this net."

How a man who can afford a few shillings can read in a modern mechanical reprint an old book still accessible in its stout original honest paper and clear print, with the good smell of years about it, he fails to understand. "Do you know," he says, "that most of the books published to-day — and all the cheap ones — will have perished in

less than a hundred years? The paper will fall to pieces."

I should say that not the least interesting part of his shop is the case in which he keeps those books which are too good to be reprinted for a shilling. What are they? Not for anything would I divulge their titles; but we know, he and I. The time has come for book-lovers to keep secrets.

Mr. Bemerton has had his triumphs; but he does not want them. He wants to progress smoothly in the middle way. Yet he has discovered two or three valuable MSS. which brought him some hundreds of pounds from English collectors and would, had he been willing to sell them to America, have produced ten times as much: and among his regular customers was Mr. Gladstone, who, when he was at No. 10 Downing Street during his last term of office as Premier, often looked in and always found something. It was almost impossible for a book to carry no association for that swooping, pouncing brain. He either knew it, or knew of it, or had always wanted to know it.

It was Mr. Gladstone who made the suggestion to Mr. Bemerton that booksellers should open at night. "The time for second-hand book-shops," he said, "is after one's work, not during one's work. I should like to stroll round this way after the House rose, even in the small hours of the morning, and spend a quarter of an hour by your shelves. So would most of the Members of both Houses. It would pay you."

'If you will announce it, sir, in a speech, I will do so," said Mr. Bemerton, and the great man laughed.

The last book that Mr. Gladstone bought was Hartley Coleridge's *Northern Worthies*. "A good book," said he, "but it might have been better. Hartley would have written better had he been his father's grandson instead of son. He was too near."

Mr. Bemerton ventured to suggest that perhaps he was too near Wordsworth also. "Oh no," said Mr. Gladstone. "He parodied him, and once he stole a leg of mutton from his larder, for a joke. That shows that Wordsworth could do him no harm."

Mr. Gladstone is Mr. Bemerton's trump card, but he tells me that Carlyle came in once, but once only. He bought Evelyn's *Life of Mrs. Godolphin* in Pickering's edition — to give, he said, to a foolish young woman; and he arranged with Mr. Bemerton to have it bound with the editor's introduction omitted. Mr. Bemerton says that after leaving the shop Carlyle returned to make certain that his instructions were understood. "Be sure to cut out the pipe-lights!" were his exact words. Rather hard on Samuel of Oxford.

Another customer was Mr. Locker-Lampson, who liked books to be slender and pocketable, but whose taste was a little too fastidious for Mr. Bemerton's shelves. Mr. Bemerton treasures an autograph copy of *Patchwork* which its author sent him.

Mr. Bemerton is assisted by his niece, Miss Ruth Wagstaff, and, according to Mrs. Duckie, it is well that he is, for as he gets older and less anxious the bookseller grows more soft-hearted and (Miss Wagstaff's phrase) soft-headed. "Plenty of soft-heartedness and soft-headedness about her, I don't think," says Mrs. Duckie in the London sarcastic idiom. But this is not doing that young lady justice. Her heart and head are both good, but she feels a responsibility thrust upon her by reason of some of her uncle's unworldly tendencies, and this lays a consequent over-emphasis on her natural practical business aptitude.

I have always had a respect amounting almost to reverence for the name of Ruth, although none of that more intimate feeling which would lead me to wish it to belong to any of my own people; I have also always felt that among names which exert any influence upon their bearers, Ruth stood high. Ruths should be quiet, wise, sincere, and if not positively beautiful, at least comely and pleasant to look upon. Miss Wagstaff has shattered this poor little fabric of sentiment. Sincerity and candour she certainly has in some abundance, but she is not wise except with the destructive wisdom that London imparts to her children, and she is neither beautiful nor comely.

She sits at a little table surrounded by the best literature and reads penny novelettes, but her eyes and ears are never off duty. If a poor woman comes in to sell a book, Ruth is watchful to prevent Mr. Bemerton from giving too much.

If a poor scholar comes in to buy one, she is equally alert to prevent Mr. Bemerton taking too little. At intervals she walks to the door to cast a glance at certain unprotected shelves or curtail the studies of the free readers. These are her despair: "They think it's a Carnegie library," she says with a toss. Some day I shall draw her attention to a little poem by Mary Lamb on this subject; but not yet. Courage may come.

The other member of the staff is Mr. Joshua Glendinning, who sits in a room in the basement for a week every month preparing Mr. Bemerton's catalogue. Mr. Glendinning is a British Museum Reading-Room hack who gets all kinds of odd jobs to keep him going, from copying sermons (on Fridays and Saturdays) to collating quoted passages in proofs and now and then correcting the Greek and Latin of a more fortunate but less scholarly literary man. He once, I learn, was not only a schoolmaster but had a flourishing school of his own; but the devil of intemperance, whose wiles for the overthrow of Christian reputations are permitted to conquer so easily, was too much for him, and he gradually and steadily lost all. The gentlest, simplest creature at heart, he now lives on a few pence a day in a Rowton House, wishes no man ill, save perhaps himself, carries a *Times* dated somewhen in 1893 protruding negligently from his pocket as if it were to-day's and he was a gentleman on his way to his stockbroker's (the harmless melancholy deception!) and sits every evening in the same

corner of the same saloon bar tearfully imbibing gin and water and laying plans for the new career which will begin on the morrow.

"Then you don't want to sell me the Chinese book again?" said Mr. Bemerton, after we had exchanged a few generalities.

"No," I said, "certainly not;" and from Miss Wagstaff's table I heard what sounded like a sarcastic sniff deprecative of her uncle's insanity in suggesting such a transaction.

"Mrs. Duckie," said Mr. Bemerton, "tells me that you sleep badly. If there are any books here that you would like to keep by your bed, you are welcome to them. The only thing is, we should like to have them back in the morning." (So Naomi was among the prophetesses after all!)

I accepted the offer cheerfully and promised that the daily restoration should be my first thought.

"For night reading," said Mr. Bemerton, "it was Mr. Lecky's theory — Mr. Lecky often came in — that books should be very nearly dull. But it's not very easy to find exactly the right thing."

"What would you call a nearly dull book?" I asked.

He looked round for awhile. "This," he said at last, and he brought me a volume of Nichols' *Literary Anecdotes*. "It's good and sound, and now and then it's amusing, but it's often very small beer. There isn't a better bed book — or wouldn't be if only it was a little lighter to hold. The

curious thing about it is that it is the one case known to me of an original book the best of which is all in the footnotes. You take a volume and try."

The world is very small; the mistake is, of course, ever to have thought it large. While Mr. Bemerton was talking to another customer, and I was at his shelves making my hands very grubby (as only old books can) and my eyes very glad (as old books can almost more surely than anything else), I noticed the address on a parcel which Ern had just finished packing — Miss Gold, The Cedars, Esher.

"Is Miss Gold one of your customers?" I asked.

"Miss Gold," said Mr. Bemerton, "is my best customer. She buys something from every catalogue, which is sent to her one post earlier than any one else. Do you know her?"

Do I know her? Miss Gold and I were once very nearly . . .

How long ago that was, and how different my life might have been! And now? I must certainly at once go to Esher to see her again.

CHAPTER VII

RECALLS OLD STRUGGLES IN THE EARLY DAYS OF GRACE AND INTRODUCES A TYRANT FROM LUDLOW

ON Easter Monday I went with Alderley and Naomi to see Lionel play for a mixed team against Surrey. It was the first match of the year and bitterly cold, but to watch real cricket again was an inducement that would have led me to brave any temperature. For — think of it! — it was my first match since the Gentlemen *v.* Players at Prince's in 1874 when the Gentlemen won by 61 runs. Thirty-four years ago! I was then twenty-four, and I went with my brother Tom and saw every ball bowled.

Thirty-four years ago, I say, and yet what is that? To me it has been a lifetime; but what has it been to that huge man with the iron-grey beard? I had read his name in the papers as being among the players, and Lionel had shown me his letter inviting him to be one of the team; and yet it needed ocular testimony to believe that this was W. G. — that the W. G. I saw make 110

at Prince's in that 1874 match was still active in the field. "'Time has run back,'" I quoted to Lionel, "'and fetched the Age of Gold';" but he was not listening. Milton is not much in his line.

All the Gentlemen *v.* Players matches were days of Grace at that time. At Prince's, I remember, G. F. came off in the first innings — 93 not out. How we all hoped that Strachan would keep his end up to let him get the hundred, which meant more than it does to-day and was not yet called a century; but it was not to be. Then came Ross, but Alfred Shaw caught and bowled him at once, and G. F.'s chance was over. If was G. F. who in the second innings (when W. G. made his 110) caused an odd bit of trouble. Old Jim Lillywhite was bowling, with his beautiful easy delivery — just a brief trot to the wicket and a gentle natural swing of his left arm. Well, he sent up a ball to G. F., who put it tamely back right to the bowler's hands, or what would have been right to his hands had not W. G. intervened. W. G.'s intervention did not mean then quite what it would to-day: he was not then so wide as a church door, but he was enough; and before Jim could get round the obstacle the ball was out of danger. Poor Lillywhite, with G. F.'s 93 not out only too present to his mind, appealed first to one umpire and then the other, but both held that W. G. was not to blame: he had not aggravated his offence

of bulk by any conscious action. The Players didn't like the decision at all, but G. F. made only 12, and the match was lost without even those runs.

The Players' strongest men were Harry Jupp, Harry Charlwood, Shaw, and Morley. Daft also was playing, but he made only 21. Charlwood, the Sussex man, came out top scorer with 85, not a few of them made by a stroke which seems to have utterly died away since then — a glance under the left leg. He was very good at it, the little, active, mutton-chop-whiskered fellow.

My very first Gentlemen *v.* Players match was in 1868. It was at Lord's, and W. G. was playing then too. He only made 134 not out, but it sufficed. People, I understand, go to see individual cricketers now, but there can never since — not even in Ranjitsinhji's best days (which I missed) — have been such excitement and enthusiasm among the watchers of the cricket skies as in the late sixties and early seventies in W. G.'s first decade. The Gentlemen's innings at the Lord's match in 1868 was a sufficient indication of the place in which this stripling of nineteen, a year older than I was, stood even then — for his "hand" (as a few old-fashioned persons still called a score) was 134 not out, and the whole side made only 201.

It was W. G., too, who took the Players' wickets — 6 in the first innings for 50 runs and 4 in the second for 31. He is not bowling much now, and he has come to field in the

way that provokes a good-natured cheer from the crowd after every stopped ball; but the shining fact remains that here he is still, in the cricket field, an active man.

As I watched him I had to rub my eyes; for it seemed as if all my years of exile, all my absurd conscientious attention to duty in that far-off alien land, had been a dream.

What has happened in the interval? Everything has happened. The Franco-Prussian war; the death of Dickens; the re-establishment of the French Republic; the bombardment of Alexandria; the rise of the Salvation Army; the Boer war; Stevenson, Whistler and Kipling; the *Daily Mail;* the assassination of Kings and Queens and Presidents; the destruction of San Francisco. And all the while W. G. has been playing cricket.

After 1868 I saw every Gentlemen *v.* Players match but two until I went to Buenos Ayres at the beginning of 1875 — in which time the Players won only once. I saw I. D. Walker make his 165 at the Oval in 1868. At Lord's in the following year I saw W. G.'s hit for 7 off Wootton, no longer possible there except with an overthrow; and I. D.'s 71; and I remember what a hard nut to crack Jupp was in the second innings. Poor Yardley, who afterwards wrote burlesques, came into the match that year.

But the 1870 match at the Oval was the great one, for that was when G. F. first played, and though he got spectacles, he took altogether 8 wickets for 46 runs, and W. G. made his

215 in the second innings. As it happened, it was too many, for it meant a draw; but what a feat it was!

Two days later, on his twenty-second birthday, at Lord's, he made 109. That was the closest match I ever saw, the Gentlemen, who went all to pieces in their second innings before old Jim Southerton and Farrands, winning by only 4 runs.

In 1871 at Lord's there was a draw again. W. G. and Hornby and Yardley and Alfred Lubbock all did well, but Ephraim Lockwood for the Players did best of all. This was the match in which George Freeman took three wickets in four balls.

I missed the Oval match that year, and alas! I was not at Brighton to see W. G. make his 217 for the Nonpareil's benefit; but I was at Lord's in 1872 again, when the champion was on hand with 77 and 112 and Daft made a superb 102 in the Players' second innings. W. G. was again in form on the next day, at the Oval, making 117, while Hornby and Yardley put on 163 between them.

The next year at Lord's the Gentlemen won almost too easily — by an innings and runs, W. G. contributing 163, while at the Oval the same thing happened again, his share then being 158 and 7 wickets for 65.

In those days you were almost as certain to see the champion come off as you now are to see an advertised actor perform. He stood aside from the glorious uncertainty of the game.

That year, 1873, gave us three matches, an extra one being arranged at Prince's, at which the Gentlemen again won by an innings and runs, W. G. making 870 and the *impayable* "Monkey" 104 (without running any one out, too,) and G. F. 63. Tom Emmett, I remember, bowled at the very top of his comic energies, and he made 32 in the second innings; but Grace and the influence of Grace were too much.

The next year, 1874, at the Oval W. G. was more restrained, but his countryman, Frank Townsend, made 59 and G. F. 28 and 47, and the "Monkey" 18 and 45, and all was well. Ephraim Lockwood carried his bat right through the Players' innings for 67, and in the second innings put on a hundred with Jupp before they were parted; but after that Absolom and Buchanan began to see daylight, and the Gentlemen won by 48 runs. Two days later, however, at the Oval the Players won for the first time since 1866, Lockwood again playing beautifully. I recall his cutting as wonderful. W. G. made 48 and 12, the "Monkey" 63, and G. F. 22 and 36. In the second innings our blood ran cold as Hill got Ridley, the "Monkey," and I. D. Walker with successive balls. It was that miracle which won the match.

And then came my Prince's match that I spoke of first, and my day of watching first-class cricket was done. These were the only matches I allowed myself; for the rest, I was busy at work or playing village cricket at home.

And now here I am with the prospect of more Gentlemen *v.* Players matches (which are the best of all) before me. It is almost too much. Such happiness seems unrealisable: once again I have the old school feeling — more than feeling, prescience — that the end of the world will come before the holidays.

Lionel did pretty well, but it was bad cricket weather, for there was a snow-laden wind which numbed the fingers. It was, however, a start: a new cricket season had begun.

I have since seen the Gentlemen *v.* Players of 1908, and I am disappointed. It was not so much the inferior cricket of the Gentlemen that troubled me: I would as soon see the Players win; it was the spirit of the Gentlemen that distressed me, or rather the want of it. Gentlemen they may be in name and even station, but they no longer play like gentlemen; they play like overworked artisans. Anxiety and boredom have crept into cricket. The Gentlemen as I remember them took the field joyously and cut a dash. It was their pride to let no ball pass them. The Gentlemen to-day are listless and without jokes — almost without personality. They have no Grace and, even more conspicuously perhaps, no "Monkey." It comes, I fancy, very largely from playing too much. What was once a game is now a calling; and a calling which involves of necessity so much disappointment and so much idleness (while waiting first for one's own innings and then for the

other innings of one's side to finish, to say nothing of rain,) must lead to a certain amount of cynicism and saturnine fatalism.

I don't think that cricket as a whole has improved in these thirty years. Batting, perhaps, is nearer perfection; but it is far less interesting. The first-class game seems to know three strokes only — the late cut, the off drive, and the leg glance: all good, and it is astonishing how many batsmen can make them; but I would like to see more hitting, in the old style, where fieldsmen are not. In my time the fieldsmen did not exert such a magnetic influence over the ball as they now do, attracting it for the most part straight to their hands.

Bowling, I think, is not so good as it was. Too much dependence has been placed on the fast bumping men and five slips, and the result is a loss in the more delicate *finesse* that was so attractive when I was young — the *finesse* of Shaw and Southerton, and Jim Lillywhite, and later, as I have been told, of Lohmann and Peel and Briggs.

But the pendulum is always swinging, and personality knows no law and may appear at any moment; so I do not despair. And it will always be the best of games.

In the evening after Lionel's match I found Queen Anne's Gate in despair. The annual visit of old Mrs. Wynne — Grandmamma, as she is called, for Margaret's mother (my stepmother) long since gave up all rivalry in the title — the annual visit of Mrs. Wynne has been fixed for next month.

Every one dreads this yearly fortnight of best behaviour, but does not say so for fear of Alderley overhearing. As for Alderley, he looks forward to his mother's visit with what appears to be the keenest anticipation, but it has been remarked by the family that never does he have so many public and legal dinners as during its progress. His heartiness at breakfast is, however, unbearable, Drusilla says.

Old Mrs. Wynne, who is nearing eighty, if not quite that age, holds decided views on the decadence of modern life, cannot forgive the Queen Anne's Gate celibacy, and has so capricious a memory that while remembering clearly incidents of the dim past she is often unaware that she is saying now what she said with equal solemnity five minutes earlier.

Her convictions and foibles, added to her tireless activity, — eighty years sitting more lightly on her shoulders than forty on those of many persons, — make her a formidable visitor, especially to Drusilla, who, being her favourite, has always to be in attendance. What this means to that impatient young rebel may be instantly understood when it is stated that Grandmamma's first excitement after she is comfortably settled under her son's roof is to visit the Royal Academy and, catalogue in hand, conscientiously look at every picture long enough at any rate to decide whether or not it merits a pencil mark. When it is added that Grandmamma's taste is governed wholly by sentiment, that Drusilla is at the Slade, and that

the visit lasts four hours early in May, the extent of the poor girl's sufferings may be gauged.

Being a happy old lady, Grandmamma says more of the pictures that she likes than of those that displease her; but it is on record in the family that, standing before one of Mr. Sargent's masterpieces, she was heard by the whole room to exclaim, "My dear, never let that man paint me!" her idea apparently being that Mr. Sargent pursued his quarry rather in the desperate way that an Italian gunner pursues little birds than was over besought. Drusilla promised.

CHAPTER VIII

I MEET AN OLD FRIEND AND RECEIVE A LESSON IN PHILOSOPHY

IT was not so easy to run down to Esher to see Miss Gold. Cowardice intervened. It requires not a little courage for a naturally diffident and sympathetic person to renew a friendship that thirty years ago was in danger of becoming the closest of all intimacies between a man and a woman.

Miss Gold — Agnes, as I called her — was then a girl of twenty-one or two, and I fancy that people were beginning to join our names. We were together a great deal; her society gave me extraordinary pleasure, for she had a natural frankness and shrewdness and was intellectually a rebel. To be a rebel then was, for a girl, very exceptional. Also she danced beautifully and so masterfully as to make me as a partner cut some kind of a figure, which no other woman could do, and she liked me enough to give me three or four dances every evening. Our last meeting was at a party in Hyde Park Street, I remember, on

the last night of the year 1874 — and I held her hand for a few moments longer than I should. I did not mean anything by it but affection. It was one of those sudden impulses to convince persons that you like them very much or feel for them very much; but I believe it meant more to her. I often regretted it, and never so much as when I heard of her accident.

Her accident! She was intensely fond of horses, and rode every morning. I have seen her in the Row many a time and envied the men with her their power to afford a horse. One day, when she was still a mere girl, soon after I left England, she was thrown, and has never stood upright since. She is carried from her bed to a couch and from her couch to bed. That is her life, and has been these thirty years.

I can assure you that I (who am still vigorous and last saw her dancing) dreaded the visit. To see Miss Gold again was for long an unbearable thought, for I possess little of that fortitude in bearing other persons' calamities that La Rochefoucauld attributed to the world at large.

But I made up my mind at last, and Naomi accompanied me to a flower shop to buy some flowers as an offering.

It was then that I made a discovery of my own with regard to the changes that have come upon England, for, looking round the florist's, I suddenly realised the vast increase not only in interest in flowers but in the variety of flowers that has been witnessed by the thirty years and

more that I have been abroad. Where can it lead? I have wondered often since, after luxurious travels amid nursery gardens and Temple marquees? Take, for example, daffodils. In my youth there were daffodils too — but they were in two varieties only, the double and the single. That was all. To-day there must be hundreds, all beautiful and all named. In my day they were not grown among grass as now they are: there was no encouragement of wild exuberance as one now sees. No one said, "How sweet Sir Watkin looks under the trees!" How could they, for Sir Watkin had not been evolved.

I wish, by the way, that some one would call a flower after me. I should feel that indeed I had lived to some purpose could I, even from my death-bed, raise a weary head and, straining my poor, exhausted, failing auditories, catch the words, "How luxuriantly the Kent Falconers bloom this year!" Thus hearing I could die in peace.

And the anemone. That is a totally new discovery. I saw for fourpence bunches of anemones of a deep purple such as was never heard of in my time. And tulips are even more wonderful. We had tulips, of course, but they were the flaunting type. The new tulips can burn too, but also how sweet and grave they can be; and again, how cheery and courageous! But most of the new colours are wonderful. Sweet-peas we used to call merely sweet-peas and grow for scent: to-day the sweet-pea has a thousand names and colours, and every year, I am told, new

and exquisite hues find expression in its butterfly bloom. The delphinium again is a magical revelation. I seem to remember something dingily like it — a larkspur we called it — but that this flower should ever adventure so gently up and down the scale of blue into the tenderest melodies — who would have expected that? The delphinium seems to me the perfect flower against or under a grey sky. It is not till the sun has left that it comes to its delicate own. I like to think of all the care and thought that the great florists have been spending during my absence to evolve this lovely apparition against my return.

Naomi tells me that gardening has become as fashionable as motoring, and England surely is very fortunate in this pretty hobby, although it hurts me a little not only to think of what I missed by being born too soon, but also to have such difficulty in finding some of my old favourites. The Sweet William, for example, eludes me in garden after garden, and mignonette I no longer smell. In our garden at home, before artistic gardening was heard of, these were grown profusely. The only flower in which I see no improvement is the rose. No doubt there are beautiful new roses; but all my favourites are the old ones, and I do not find that the new roses smell as sweet. The cabbage rose remains the most satisfying of all.

Miss Gold lives in a large and cheerful Georgian house. Her sitting-room is on the ground floor, with high French windows uniting

it to the lawn. Like so many invalids, she is far less susceptible to cold than most of us, and she lies there with the windows open most of the time. On fine days she is wheeled into the garden itself or into the paddock. All the pretty apparatus for ingratiating human beings with birds is to be seen in the garden — the bath and the nest boxes and the cocoanut for the tits. This means, of course, the privation of a cat; but instead of a cat Miss Gold keeps several dogs, with a King Charles spaniel as the most privileged, and in the paddock she has a home of rest for old horses.

The garden is very full of flowers — so full that I might well have bought something else with my money — and it has also two large cedars, beneath which her wheeled couch often stands.

Very nervously did I ring Miss Gold's bell; but, as is usual in this life, I found the realisation of the visit far easier than the anticipation. The little lady was brave enough for two. "My dear Kent," she said, after a little while, "you must not come and see me if you are going to look so sad. I want you to come often: you will do me so much good. But it is quite useless if you have such a mournful expression. What is it after all? I am very happy lying here. I have many kind friends. The garden is so wonderful always, and I have a gardener who is also an invaluable companion and never wants to make a rustic fence. The birds trust me: there is a robin that comes right into the room and will do so until he is a month or so older and has been

told more about man's nature. I have letters every morning, and my eyes are so good that I can read and write all day if I like. As for death, my dear Kent, we must not be so frightened of it. I have grown to think of death without any fear or shuddering. After all, if I live to be eighty, my life on my eightieth birthday will be as much behind me as a child's of five. It is only to-day that we live for — to-day and to-morrow. No one dares to look much more forward than that. The past is so completely over that in a kind of way one life may be said to be as long as another."

I did my best to be equally optimistic, and quoted an old epigram of my friend Trist's to the effect that every birth certificate is in a manner of speaking a death warrant.

Miss Gold liked that. "And another thing," she said: "considering how uncertain is life and how many fatal accidents occur every day, it is illogical to be cheerful with every one else, and pull a long face when you come to see me. Because I may be lying on this couch in ten years' time just as I am to-day; whereas one of your strong, healthy friends with whom you dine to-night may be knocked down and killed by a motor car to-morrow morning. No, Kent, with me you must be gay."

I so far fell into her humour as to tell her about one or two of Mr. Giles's Chinese heroes, whose quiet acceptance of death is perhaps their most astonishing characteristic to a Western reader — the characteristic which most differentiates

them from ourselves, who cling to life more passionately with each generation. I told her of the death of Wang Ching-wên of the fifth century A.D., who one evening, as he was playing chess with a friend, received orders to commit suicide. "After having read the Imperial mandate, he finished his game and put the board away. A bowl of poison was brought to him; and then turning to his friend he remarked jestingly, 'I am afraid I cannot ask you to join me!' and quietly drained the bowl."

"That is the way," said Miss Gold; "but it certainly is not English."

I told her also of the death of Hsieh Chiu-chēng, whose was perhaps the most ludicrously ironical end on record, since it came "from poisoning himself with a compound which he fancied was the Elixir of Life."

Miss Gold asked me if any women were included in the book. There are, of course, a few, but China is not a woman's country. One is Liu Shih, the wife of an official at Court, who also had dealings with the cup. The Emperor one day sent her "a potion which he commanded her to drink, and which he said would cause instant death if she was jealous; adding that if she was not jealous she need not drink it. Without hesitation she drank it off, saying that death would be preferable to such a life."

Another Chinese lady is Li Fu-jen of the second century B.C., who was so beautiful that "one glance of hers," said a poet, "would destroy

a City, two glances a State." Li Fu-jen, however, lived for pleasure; more heroic was Li Hsien, who, finding that she fascinated a student named Chêng Yüan-ho to such an extent that he began to neglect his career, she tore out her eyes: "after which," says the historian, "her lover rapidly rose to distinction." But — and here comes in the surprise to the Western reader accustomed to think of the Chinese as monsters of impassive selfishness — after he had achieved distinction he married her, all sightless as she was. Isn't that a pretty story?

To my mind, one of the most agreeable girls in the book is the sarcastic waiting-maid who rebuked the meanness of Táo Ku. "On one occasion he bade a newly purchased waiting-maid get some snow and make tea in honour of the Feast of Lanterns, asking, somewhat pompously, 'Was that the custom in your old home?' 'Oh no,' the girl replied; 'they were a rough lot. They just put up a gold-splashed awning, and had a little music and some old wine.'"

We talked also of the Wynnes, and Miss Gold made me promise to bring Naomi to see her, and she asked also if I would bring Trist, whom neither of us had seen since the early seventies, but who was in those days my inseparable friend and very attractive also to her. She was greatly amused by my discovery of her name at Bemerton's and the chance which had taken me to live over her favourite bookseller's shop. But in Mr. Dabney she was even more interested.

"How extraordinary to think he should be in the same house," she said. "There is no journalist whom I follow so closely. He has a fearless mind and a hatred of injustice. Do you like him?"

"Well, he compels attention," I said, "but he is a little too near white heat for me."

"If he were cooler," said Miss Gold, "he would probably be tolerant — like you — and then he would be no use. There is so much comfortable tolerance to-day, so little anger. I hope he will go on being angry."

"He will," I said.

CHAPTER IX

HOW MRS. FRANK TRIED HER INNOCENT GAMES ON ONE OF THE GREAT ONES OF THE EARTH

THERE is a most amusing article in this week's *Balance* on the Scold and her place in mediæval life. The writer had seen a ducking-chair somewhere, and had been led by it to a series of reflections on the Scold and, what is perhaps more interesting, the Scold's husband.

It is a topic on which we are very ill informed, and the fancy has a free field. What, he asked, was the husband doing while his wife was being corrected? Was he a spectator or an absentee? Was he proud — a kind of inverted hero — or was he ashamed? Had he not more probably a very lively sense of what was in store for him at night and was he not nerving himself for the fray in the inn parlour?

The writer then went on to consider the home-coming of the Scold: wet through certainly, but was she penitent? Did she scold no more? Is any one ever cured? The home-coming of the

husband, he suggested, would be later. And so forth.

Meeting Mr. Dabney on the stairs, I mentioned the article and asked him who wrote it. He said it was written by a young fellow named Wynne — Frank Wynne. Isn't that odd? I knew Frank for an amusing embroiderer, but I never thought of him having so much humour as that.

He and his wife being at Queen Anne's Gate to dinner, I congratulated him.

"How did you know I wrote it?" he asked; and I told him about Mr. Dabney. "By the way," I added to Naomi, "that proves my prophecy. Don't you remember my saying that Mr. Dabney and I would find we had a common friend; and it turns out to be Frank."

Frank, however, denied that he knew him: his connection with the paper was the result of correspondence, and so I said I would bring Mr. Dabney to Barton Street to tea and they should then meet.

"But isn't he very fierce?" asked Mrs. Frank, thinking, I am sure, of the twins.

"You must tame him," I said.

She certainly tried.

Never was there such a tea. Mrs. Frank must have lain awake half the night meditating upon the attack, for this was her first editor, and was she not a young journalist's wife? (Such a chance.) In her original scheme were hot cakes and cold, muffins and crumpets, brown bread and

white, jam and marmalade; but she had a doubt and put it to Frank.

"Isn't there a danger," she said, "that he may think we're too well off already?"

Frank thought there might. So the muffins went and the other hot cakes and the marmalade.

"And what about my dress?" she said. "I should like to wear the red one, but it does look a little bit expensive."

"It's very beautiful," said Frank.

"Don't you like the purple one, then?" she asked anxiously.

"Of course I do: they're both beautiful."

"Well, which shall it be?"

"Why not the red dress and leave off all your rings but the wedding ring?"

And so did these Machiavellian babes arrange it.

They might have saved themselves their trouble, for Mr. Dabney is one of those persons who carry their environment with them. He ate his tea nobly, but he could not have said afterwards what he consumed: it was all cake to him, or all bread-and-butter, such is the activity of his mind.

Mrs. Frank was adorable: she talked her best talk and, her fears allayed, sent for the twins, whom Mr. Dabney inspected with a most admirable show of interest, although at any moment I felt he might remark that one or the other was too long and would be better with twenty lines cut out.

He arranged for some articles with Frank, and then left. Mrs. Frank was very happy, but I doubt if her innocent and loyal strategy had anything to do with it. Still, it is very pretty to see a young wife working for her husband.

"Frank is a dear," Mrs. Frank said to me later, "but really he is a little too casual about refusing work. *The Balance* only takes two articles a week, which doesn't pay for more than nurse and our dinners, but nothing will induce him to write for other papers unless he likes them."

"*O si sic omnes!*" I said.

"What does that mean?" she asked coldly. "I have an uncle who talks like that."

"I'm very sorry," I said, "I won't do it again. It means that I wish all the other journalists were like Frank. Then we should have some decent honest papers."

"Oh yes," she said, "but really one can be too nice and fastidious. What about the twins? I wanted them to go to Eton. And he won't write a play either," she continued. "That's the way to make money, and it's so easy. We go to the theatre pretty often, and I never see anything that Frank couldn't have done better. All you have to do is to make people say foolish things in nice clothes. But Frank says he couldn't. He says it's a special gift, and he hates the stage. He won't even try."

"Frank's all right," I said; "he's finding himself. You mustn't hurry him."

"There are so many things we want," she replied. "You don't know."

"I'm afraid you're a bad woman," I said. "You should believe more in the ravens. Young journalists and young journalists' wives ought not to be rich. If you talk like this I shall begin to think you have made a mistake and ought really to have married a stockbroker."

As a matter of fact, Frank is doing quite well enough. His name is getting to be known for delicate work, and he is in the way of making four or five hundred a year already. That is plenty. But you might as well pour Château Yquem into the Thames as tell a young wife that she would be less happy with more money.

Frank, however, does not let it worry him, but goes smiling through the world, elaborating his little humorous fancies, building up little literary lyrics, and writing reviews and so forth; and there is probably no great danger in Mrs. Frank's covetousness. But I wish she wouldn't.

I don't know that I blame her, for the air is so full of cupidity nowadays that it is taken in through the pores unless you watch yourself very carefully. She is otherwise a rational little woman, of no great force of character but plenty of cheerfulness and loyalty, who has in reality one of the serenest of lives, for the twins are no more trouble than they ought to be to supply their mother with congenial topics of conversation and that leaven of anxiety that keeps mothers happy, and Mrs. Frank's mother and Frank's mother vie with each other in shower-

ing little presents on the household, and Naomi is continually looking in with her dear sunny face.

Let Mrs. Frank be happy while she can. Some day her husband will be offered £1000 a year to edit a paper, and a literary peeress will take them up, and that will be the end.

I find that Frank has been selling his review copies to Mr. Bemerton for a long time, and they are old friends. I met him there recently on the search for second-hand copies of the collected poems of one of the older living poets, having had a commission from an editor to prepare his obituary notice against the dread summons. I had not given much thought to this branch of journalistic industry, but of course now that I think of it I see that the pigeon-holes of Fleet Street must be full of these anticipatory articles which only need occasional revision to date to be all ready when the scythe is finally sharpened. To meet an editor must be for a thoughtful celebrity as chilling as the spectacle of the mummy at the Egyptian banquet.

Frank tells me that the practice on one of the papers for which he is engaged is to withhold payment until the article is used. "This," he says, "is all very well so long as one is flush. But if one were broke just think of what one might be tempted to do, for I see Blank [his poetical victim] at the Museum continually, and could easily poison his soup at the Vienna Café."

"Poets," Frank said to me one day, "ought to have some common fund from which they might

borrow for sustenance without shame — some Pactolian spring into which to dip their cups. You know those ingenious contribution boxes invented by Mr. Sidney Holland, which invite you to drop in a penny and by so doing maintain the London Hospital for one second — a dial indicating the passage of your own pennyworth of time as you do so. Well, I thought once of adopting this plan, and calling upon the public to drop in a penny and thus maintain me. 'A penny keeps a poet for half an hour,' it might have said."

"Apropos of poets," said I, "come upstairs and I will show you a book." I need hardly say what the book was.

I delighted Frank immensely by reading him the passage describing the ruse to which Ch'ēn Tzu-ang the poet resorted in order to win recognition.

"Proceeding to the capital he purchased a very expensive guitar which had been for a long time on sale, and then let it be known that on the following day he would perform upon it in public. This attracted a large crowd; but when Ch'ēn arrived he informed his auditors that he had something in his pocket worth much more than the guitar. Thereupon he dashed the instrument into a thousand pieces, and forthwith began handing round copies of his own writings."

Like every one else who sees this fascinating volume, Frank was wild for more, and I read him excerpts from the lives of other poets — not better

than Dr. Samuel Johnson's, but more concise and freakish. Such as Wang Po, a poet of the seventh century A.D., who began as a statesman, but on being dismissed from office for satirising the cock-fighting propensities of the Imperial princes, filled up his leisure by composing verses.

"He never meditated upon these beforehand, but after having prepared a quantity of ink ready for use, he would drink himself tipsy and lie down with his face covered up. On waking, he would seize his pen and write off verses, not a word of which needed to be changed; whence he acquired the sobriquet of Belly-draft."

Liu Ling, another poet, and one of the Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grave, was also a hard drinker and a man of infinite humour. It was he who declared that "'to a drunken man the affairs of this world appear but as so much duckweed in a river.' He wished to be always accompanied by a servant with wine, and followed by another with a spade, so that he might be buried where he fell. On one occasion, yielding to the entreaties of his wife, he promised to 'swear off,' and bade her prepare the usual sacrifices of wine and meat. When all was ready, he prayed, saying, 'O God, who didst give to Liu Ling a reputation through wine, he being able to consume a gallon at a sitting and requiring a quart to sober him again, listen not to the words of his wife, for she speaketh not truth.' Thereupon he drank up the sacrificial wine, and was soon as drunk as ever."

A tenderer genius was Chēng Ku, of the ninth century A.D., who "said that no one should sing his *Song of the Partridge* in the presence of Southerners, as it made them think sadly of their far-off homes."

Li Po, founder of the coterie known as the Eight Immortals of the Wine Cup (having got his hand in as a club-maker by forming, some years earlier, the hard-drinking company known as the Six Idlers of the Bamboo Brook), should certainly be better known in a country where the sanction of an illustrious wine-bibber — a Burns or an Omar — is so necessary to literary convivialists. The mother of Li Po, who roystered and revelled in the eighth century A.D., dreamed just before his birth of the planet Venus. The boy was therefore a poet at ten years of age, and a great swordsman very soon after.

About A.D. 742 he reached Ch'ang-an. The Emperor "was charmed with his verses, prepared a bowl of soup for him with his own hands, and at once appointed him to the Han-liu College." Later, "with a lady of the Seraglio to hold his ink-slab, he dashed off some of his most impassioned lines; at which the Emperor was so overcome that he made the powerful eunuch Kao Li-shih go down on his knees and pull off the poet's boots." Kao's desire for revenge made it necessary for Li Po to leave the court, which he did with seven companions, and they are now known collectively as the Eight Immortals of the Wine Cup. He met his death, characteristically,

by drowning, "from leaning one night over the edge of the boat, in a drunken effort to embrace the reflection of the moon."

Li Po had no monopoly of such ends. Fu I, another poet and the originator of epitaphs, was of the same mettle. His own epitaph, which he composed with accurate foresight, runs thus —

> "Fu I loved the green hills and the white clouds,
> Alas! he died of drink."

"Very different from our reputed Laureate," Frank remarked, adding, "I wish you'd lend me that book."

"For why?" I replied. "To write about it?"

He admitted the weakness.

"No," I said with startling decision. "No."

CHAPTER X

A HERO-WORSHIPPER AGAIN GLIMPSES HIS HERO, AFTER MANY YEARS

TO look up Trist was, I knew, both necessary and desirable, and yet I dreaded it too. Not quite as I had dreaded the visit to Esher, but as a duty to be put off. Why? For we had been great friends; more, he had been my exemplar, my model. His year or two of seniority, his *flair* for civilisation, as I might call it, had set him in the position of mentor. I had been rather at his feet than by his side. That was thirty and more years ago; and now, . . . do you understand?

In the days when Trist and I shared rooms, I was in the City and he sub-edited an evening paper. He was fresh from Oxford, wealthy, contemptuous, and gay; he took his duties very lightly, but was an admirable man for the post, and did much to establish the paper's reputation on the humorous side.

Although I could not afford it, I went to the same tailor and hosier; I smoked the same brand,

which was then a simple thing to do, for it was before the second discovery of tobacco, so to speak, when there were few mixtures, and no "Pioneers of the Smoking World," and it was possible to walk twenty yards along a street and not pass three tobacconists. I am not naturally a hero-worshipper, but Trist found me at an impressionable age and he filled an empty space. I had better have been in love, no doubt, but that was not my way.

Soon after I had left England he threw up journalism, travelled, then did some political private-secretarial work and so forth, and as relation after relation died and left him money he gradually became a connoisseur of life and nothing else, and settled down in Gray's Inn, permanently, with his floating population of fifty pairs of perfect trousers, a profile glass, and an invaluable man.

In Buenos Ayres I had written to Trist now and then, and he to me: enough to inform each other that the end was not yet, but little more.

I continued to put off the call as long as I could. There is something very perilous in the resumption of intercourse after many years, especially when the man you are going to see was once your hero. Heroes do not wear well, and it is a question whether they are less heroic to their valets who see them continually or to old admirers who have acquired thirty years of experience since they saw them last. I was going, I felt, to see Trist with very clear eyes,

and I did not want to. I am absurdly fond of the past.

Few friendships, I suppose, wear honestly through a long life. The friends do not progress equally; one matures quickly, the other slowly. One becomes pious, the other impious. They marry (this is the commonest interruption of all) antipathetic wives. It is all as it should be if they were really friends once, for friends, in fact, belong to periods rather than to all time, although sentiment would have it otherwise. One is always changing a little, although of radical change there is almost none, and new friends are found in tune with each stage. I could admit no longer any need for Trist, and yet all the same I longed to see him and dreaded it too.

There was another obstacle in the way. We were both bachelors. In every man, I take it, even the most married, there sleeps a bachelor; but a bachelor through and through as I have been, and as Trist is, is a less negotiable quantity. No one probably has more affectionate impulses than I, — a warmer wish to help and comfort, — and yet I am always conscious of a slight barrier between me and those I would befriend and assist, a barrier which probably would not be there had I married. Marriage, there is no doubt, is a solvent; and the curious thing is that the married reveal their state: marconigrams pass.

Bachelors have many advantages, but they are all minor. Perhaps the greatest advantage they enjoy is that of still being able to follow an

impulse; but even this rarely seems to give them all the pleasure that it would give many a man who has tasted restriction. Feeding on impulses can become as distasteful as feeding on jam roll.

As it happened, fate took the matter out of my hands, for I walked bang into Trist one afternoon under my own roof — that is to say, in Bemerton's shop. He was engaged in the characteristic occupation of making some one do something for him, and in this case he was dealing with such ordinarily unpromising material as Miss Ruth Wagstaff. He seemed so genuinely glad to see me again that I felt ashamed of having so long deferred my visit; and I promised to dine with him that very evening.

I found Trist in very comfortable, almost luxurious, rooms, at the top of a seventeenth-century house in Gray's Inn, overlooking a beautiful grave square on one side and a beautiful grave lawn on the other. Not quite the true Oxford cloister, but very near it; and with busy London within a stone's-throw. His only companion is his man, Jack Rogers, once a sailor in the King's Navy, but now through the loss of an eye enjoying a pension on land, although only twenty-nine years of age, and acting as valet, cook, and parlour-maid to my old friend. Why a navy which owes most of its prestige to the activities of a man who lacked not only one eye but also one arm should be in such a hurry to get rid of Jack I cannot understand; for he sees far more with his widowed orb than the ordinary observer does

with two, and is quite the most capable all-round hand I have yet met.

That Trist should live in Gray's Inn, off Holborn, of all streets, and that his man should not have been for some years with the Duke of B—— and the Earl of A——, are the surprising things; but then Trist makes a point of never belonging wholly to any type. His aim is always to be original somewhere, although never original enough to be conspicuous.

Another of his foibles is to be thought worldly to a point of cynicism; but he is of course far too English to be a genuine success, although he may deceive the poor observer. Every man has some ideal, and Trist has been true to his ever since I have known him. I should describe his ideal, which he acquired as quite a youth, as a blend of Lytton's Zanoni and Meredith's Adrian Harley, the wise youth. (For one has to get one's durable exemplars from books; in real life one finds them out.) Underneath, however, he has a sympathetic kindliness which has prompted him to many actions wholly out of keeping with his cool exterior.

He does nothing: he is a true dilletante; but though he does nothing he knows all. He studies the papers, collects gossip, sees the new plays, reads the new books, attends sales at Christie's and Sotheby's. Half-past seven finds him in evening dress as naturally as it finds a baby in bed. He is never in a hurry, and never late. His cigarette case is always full.

Trist's second ambition (the first being never to be unprepared) is to own the best Old Crome. His life may be said almost to have been dedicated to Old Crome. He has three on his walls, and he wants others, but they must be better than the three; which to my eye are perfect. Two are views of Mousehold Heath, which stood for the promised land to this painter, and the other is a cottage and a tree and a peasant woman. They are the only pictures in the room. In the dining-room one painter again is represented, and one only, the rare and marvellous Bonington, who perished in his pride, but not before he had revolutionised French landscape painting, — all water-colours. Trist spends hours every week in curiosity shops, and in the summer, when he is driven from London by sheer lack of activity there, he makes his holiday in Norfolk, partly sailing on the Broads and partly bicycling among the farmhouses, into which with masterly address he finds his way and scans the walls for the Master's glow. His manners are charming, and he rarely meets with a rebuff. Down to the present time, however, he tells me, one Crome and one only has he found that he covets — and that he cannot get. The owner, a strong wealthy farmer of as much independence and will-power as Trist himself, would as soon sell his daughter.

Nothing else moves Trist to feeling. Old Crome and Bonington can light his eye, but for the rest his attitude through life is one of cool, amused detachment and perfect self-possession.

I have from time to time set down his *obiter dicta* on the management of one's affairs in a very civilised progress through this vale of tears; but as I can remember only those that he has dropped in my hearing, the record necessarily is deprived of thousands that may be better, — as indeed I suppose Boswell's also is. (A new collection of Johnson's good things uttered when Boswell was absent would stand almost first among the books we desire. I mentioned this to Mr. Bemerton one day, for we often talk of the impossible books we should like to have. "Yes," he said, "and what a good subject for the forger." He is, by the way, greatly interested in literary forgeries, and keeps a number of them together on a shelf, and is one of the few people who have read *Vortigern*.)

Here, then, are certain of the aphorisms with which Trist would, in his Chesterfieldian manner, instruct his son, if he had anything so ridiculous. All begin with the same words — concerning which I might perhaps say that by "life" Trist does not mean what a poet means, or a saint, or a schoolboy, or a motorist, or even what I mean by it. Trist means by "life" a protected ease. I have jotted them down from time to time as I remembered them — my first thought being mischievously to convict him of inconsistency. I see now, however, that one definite idea connects all.

"The art of life," says Trist, "is the pigeonholing of women." True enough of Englishmen, at any rate, who want women only when they

want them (and then they must behave); but no Frenchman would say it.

"The art of life," says Trist, "is to say the same things to everybody. To differentiate one's treatment of people may be interesting, but it leads to complications."

"The art of life," says Trist, "is to assume that no one else has any feelings."

"The art of life," says Trist, "is the use and not abuse of alcohol. A wise *apéritif* can make a bad dinner almost good, and a bad partner almost negligible."

"The art of life," says Trist, "is to be so well known at a good restaurant that you can pay by cheque."

"The art of life," says Trist, "is to make your tailor come to you."

"The art of life," says Trist, who hates gossip, "is never to see two unrelated people together; but if you must, — and it can't be helped very easily, — never to mention it again. Three-quarters of the ills of life proceed from the report that So-and-so has been seen with So-and-so. There is too much talk. A wise autocrat would cut out the tongue of every baby. A silent society would probably be a happy one; because it would be largely without scandal." That seemed to me, I said, too drastic, and I recommended instead the example (from my Chinese book) of Hsin Shao, of the second and third century A.D., "who is now chiefly remembered in connection with his practice of devoting the first day of every

month to criticism of his neighbours and their conduct."

"The art of life," says Trist, "is never to be out of small change."

"The art of life," says Trist, "is to keep down acquaintances. One's friends one can manage, but one's acquaintances can be the devil."

"The art of life," says Trist, "is to show your hand. There is no diplomacy like candour. You may lose by it now and then, but it will be a loss well gained if you do. Nothing is so boring as having to keep up a deception."

"The art of life," says Trist, "is to live near a post office, but never to go there one's self."

"The art of life," says Trist, "is never to think you know what other people are feeling about you. You are sure to be wrong."

"The art of life," says Trist, "is to be thought odd. Everything will then be permitted to you. The best way to be thought odd is to return a cheque now and then on a conscientious scruple. There is no such investment."

Trist also has a very interesting and ingenious theory that goes more deeply into the management of life. "I do not believe," he once said to me, "in carving out our own destiny, but I believe that the unexpected happens so often, and the expected so seldom, that one might by steadily anticipating ills avoid calamity."

Trist, however, is not really as monstrous as these maxims would make him out to be. For the full play of his personality he must un-

doubtedly be calm and prosperous and spoiled; but once he is in that state of bliss he can be extraordinarily kind. One would not see him carrying a poor woman's bundle, or putting himself out over a street casualty; but he has befriended several young artists and musicians, and he lends money capriciously to needy persons at the very moment when money means most to them. He likes to play Fate.

I came away from his rooms that first evening a little saddened. I could not help contrasting the past, when he was so necessary to me, with the present, when we each made the other constrained, and had grown so naturally into the power of doing without each other that the early conditions could never be restored.

But since then I have fallen into the old Trist habit again, and now I like to be with him almost as much as ever, although I am no longer plastic as I was. I like his fastidiousness, and it amuses me (and perhaps does me good) to watch the skill with which he looks ahead by instinct to ensure his comfort.

We are to go down to Miss Gold's to tea one afternoon next week. Trist, it seems, has a taxi-cab driver in his pocket, and he will convey us there. "I telephone him when I want him," said Trist; "it is far better than being bothered with a car of one's own."

Of course.

CHAPTER XI

MR. BEMERTON'S FIRST BED BOOK BRINGS US INTO THE COMPANY OF QUAINT AND LEARNED GENTLEMEN

THE older I grow, the less, I find, do I want to read about anything but human beings. (The proper study of matured mankind is certainly man.) But human beings as human beings are not enough: they must, to interest me, have qualities of simplicity or candour or quaintness. A few such I have found in Mr. Bemerton's first highly-commended bed book — the *Literary Anecdotes* of John Nichols, a series of volumes, very unpromising at first, and truly as dull as Mr. Lecky told my friend that a bed book should be, descriptive of the attainments of the principal contributors to *The Gentleman's Magazine* (best of periodicals) in the second half of the eighteenth century (a period when to be an antiquary and a gentleman was so easy) when that publication belonged to Bowyer the printer.

For the most part these old dry-as-dust clergy-

men and scholars had little enough to recommend them to any one but Bowyer, who seems to have basked with equal satisfaction in the friendship of all; but when one looks deeper one finds treasure.

Sir Hildebrand Jacob, for example, one does not soon forget. Sir Hildebrand was a bibliophile and a minor poet and dramatist, who died in 1790. "As a general scholar, he was exceeded by few; in his knowledge of the Hebrew language he scarcely had an equal. In the earlier part of his life, one custom which he constantly followed was very remarkable. As soon as the roads became pretty good, and the fine weather began to set in, his man was ordered to pack up a few things in a portmanteau, and with these his master and himself set off, without knowing whither they were going. When it drew towards evening, they inquired at the first village they saw, whether the great man in it was a lover of books, and had a fine library. If the answer was in the negative, they went on farther; if in the affirmative, Sir Hildebrand sent his compliments, that he was come to see him; and there he used to stay till time or curiosity induced him to move elsewhere. In this manner Sir Hildebrand had very nearly passed through the greatest part of England, without scarcely ever sleeping at an inn, unless where town or village did not afford one person civilised enough to be glad to see a gentleman and a scholar."

Sir Hildebrand reminds one a little of the Don, though lacking utterly in any suggestion of the

pathos which so beautifully cloaks that sublime figure. To seek books comes, however, next to the search for adventures and wrongs to redress. A good author might found a very charming story on this literary knight-errant and his encounters with the rural collector. It is not the least loss brought to us by railroads and motor cars that the problem of the lodging for the night is so easily solved to the exclusion of chance hospitality. One wants to know more of Sir Hildebrand — how he went to work to become a guest and what misconceptions he had to live down.

Another of Nichols' heroes is the Rev. William Budworth, the schoolmaster who so nearly engaged the young Samuel Johnson as an usher and who was the instructor of the learned Bishop Hurd, the friend of Warburton. Mr. Budworth, who taught the Free Grammar School at Brewood, was a precisian of the first water. He made no mistakes. "His person, which was rather above the middle height, was formed with the nicest symmetry; and he had, perhaps, as fine a presence as almost any man in the kingdom. His air, deportment, language, voice, in short, every word and every action, announced the accomplished gentleman. He had not the fine eagle-eye of a Condé, nor, askaunt, did it flash conviction and terror like Chatham's; there was nothing tremendous in his aspect; he never spoke like thunder, nor did he command with the pomp of a bashaw; but there was an irresistible and indescribable something, which always commanded respect, and for ever

inspired the beholders with awe; his look and his voice pierced to the very inmost soul."

I imagine that, which is the work not of Nichols but of a contributor, to be the perfect description of the perfect schoolmaster. One sees what a terror would such a man strike into the heart and knees of the young. It was a dull day for English readers (I think) when the description of the person was first considered unnecessary. We rarely get it now.

Among the anecdotes of Mr. Budworth (and I may say here that Nichols' *Literary Anecdotes*, in spite of its title, is poorer in anecdotes than almost any book I ever opened) is this, referring to a social and more or less unbending, if not convivial, evening at that model's house. Mr. Budworth, I should first say, was a vegetarian. "Among other topics of conversation, Mr. Martin took the freedom to ask Mr. Budworth, what his sentiments were respecting the lawfulness or unlawfulness of eating blood. His reply was nearly in the following terms: 'I have read the authors on both sides of the question; those who wrote in favour of the prohibition had the greatest weight with me, and therefore I have always abstained from eating it.'"

Boswell, I suppose, made the record of this kind of conversation possible. I wish it had not gone out; but with hero-worship (of which it was a symptom) it has passed. We seem to have grown too critical for such hero-worship any more; the minor dictator, being no longer able to induce

people to take him at his own valuation, has either become merely a grumbler or has diminished into a man and a brother.

Another possessor of the higher dignity — but a very different man from Mr. Budworth, although his contemporary — was John Baskerville (noble name!), the Birmingham printer of the Bible whose spacious page one occasionally and very joyfully observes on the lectern of such village churches as one has the luck to find open. Baskerville printed the Bible like an angel, but he did not esteem its matter. He was, in fact, a very determined agnostic, and in his last will and testament he provided for the persistence of his hostility to accepted dogma. John Baskerville is thus described by a friend of Nichols: "In regard to his private character, he was much of a humorist, idle in the extreme; but his invention was of the true Birmingham model, active. He could well design, but procured others to execute: wherever he found merit, he caressed it: he was remarkably polite to the stranger, fond of show; a figure rather of the smaller size, and delighted to adorn that figure with gold lace. Although constructed with the light timbers of a frigate, his movement was stately as a ship of the line."

From the printer we pass to a printer's friend — to Mr. James Elphinstone the grammarian, the friend of Benjamin Franklin and also of Johnson and Jortin. Mr. Elphinstone had a very agreeable gentle eccentricity. "The colour of his suit of clothes was invariably, except when in mourn-

ing, what is called a drab; his coat was made in the fashion that reigned, when he returned from France, in the beginning of the last century, with flaps and buttons to the pockets and sleeves, without a cape; he always wore a powdered bag-wig, with a high toupée; and walked with a cocked hat and an amber-headed cane; his shoe-buckles had seldom been changed, and were always of the same size; and he never put on boots. It must be observed, however, that he lately, more than once, offered to make any change Mrs. Elphinstone might deem proper: but in her eyes his virtues and worth had so sanctified his appearance, that she would have thought the alteration a sacrilege. Mr. Elphinstone's principal foibles originated, some in virtue itself, and others in the system he had early laid down for preserving the purity of the English tongue. As an instance of the former, when any ladies were present in company whose sleeves were at a distance from their elbows, or whose bosoms were at all exposed, he would fidget from place to place, look askance, with a slight convulsion of his left eye, and never rest till he approached some of them, and, pointing to their arms, say, 'Oh yes, indeed! it is very pretty, but it betrays more fashion than modesty!' or some similar phrase; after which he became very good-humoured."

Another gentle humorist (in the old sense of the word, which is far better than the new) was Dr. John Taylor, Registrar of Cambridge University, editor of Demosthenes and Æschylus, and

Canon Residentiary of St. Paul's, who died in 1766. A friend sent to Sylvanus Urban an admirable account of this old scholar, containing a very pleasant picture of his patience with visitors — more than patience, his sweet cordiality. "You have mentioned that Dr. Taylor was too busy a man to be idle. This is too shining a particular in the Doctor's temper and abilities not to be a little more insisted upon. If you called on him in College after dinner, you were sure to find him sitting at an old oval walnut-tree table entirely covered with books, in which, as the common expression runs, he seemed to be buried: you began to make apologies for disturbing a person so well employed; but he immediately told you to advance, taking care to disturb as little as you could the books on the floor; and called out, 'John, John, bring pipes and glasses;' and then fell to procuring a small space for the bottle just to stand on, but which could hardly ever be done without shoving off an equal quantity of the furniture at the other end; and he instantly appeared as cheerful, good-humoured, and *dégagé*, as if he had not been at all engaged or interrupted. Suppose now you had stayed as long as you would, and been entertained by him most agreeably, you took your leave, and got half-way down the stairs; but, recollecting somewhat that you had more to say to him, you go in again; the bottle and glasses were gone, the books had expanded themselves so as to re-occupy the whole table, and he was just as much buried in them as

when you first broke in on him. I never knew this convenient faculty to an equal degree in any other scholar."

It seems to me that Dr. John Taylor in his study would make a good picture for an artist of interiors.

But my favourites among Bowyer's friends are William Clarke, the Sussex parson, and Richard Gough, the antiquary of Enfield. Mr. Gough's particular line was topography, and in addition to a work of his own on the topography of Great Britain, he translated and edited Camden's *Britannia*. Having considerable wealth, he was able to employ illustrators to enrich his text very thoroughly, and when he died he left all his MSS. and drawings to the Bodleian, where they may be seen by the curious to-day. But the trait in the character of this amiable scholar which has most attracted me is his kindness to animals — more than kindness, for any one can feel that, but gratitude too, which found expression in the minute and thoughtful epitaphs which he wrote for the gravestones of his pets. Here is one upon Toby — perhaps a sparrow: —

To immortalise the memory
of Merit and Innocence, which, having long since left the abodes of men, shine forth among brutes, and to perpetuate the unhappiness of Favourites,
is this monument erected.

He who is here deposited was, like all the good, removed from future evils, though his character was such as might alone procure him esteem. His station was sufficient to protect him from those insults which his equals continually bear; and his greatest recommendation was to have been taught at home. He was no wise

inferior to the fam'd favourite of Lesbia, though all his praise is confined to this; but he owed his death to a different cause, the sportive jealousy of another object of partiality having sent hither the unfortunate Toby.

Pretty if heavy pleasantry, is it not? Here follows an epitaph upon a cat: —

After a life spent in the useful
purposes of peopling the world with
my own race, defending my
friends from intruding
animals, and entertain-
ing them in my youth
with wanton tricks,
here rest I
in peace,
the old TORTOISE-SHELL CAT.

Had I died in Egypt, an immortal sepulchre and religious veneration had remembered me to posterity; but now, such is the change of time, it is owing to Mr. Jarvis and a plate of lead that you hear any more of me, since compassionate man put an end to the calamities of life, which others of his species would have but augmented. As the Gods are said to have considered their faithful votaries by an easy death, the same reward have I obtained for my services; and thus have I closed a scene of great revolutions, though few of these affected me.

So Priam, father of an endless race,
His happiness and honour, while his Troy
Remain'd and flourish'd, dropt into his tomb
By great Achilles' hand; and not a stone
Tells where the bones of Asia's Monarch rest.

Finally, let me quote what is perhaps the only inscription extant on the grave of a pheasant, a bird which most county gentlemen, even the kindest, first kill for sport and then honour in death in a totally different way. I am not

blaming them: I wish only to point the contrast. Mr. Gough composed this epitaph on a pheasant that he had tamed: —

Beneath
this humble but grateful monument rests all that remains of one who, after having, amidst the changes and vicissitudes of this mortal life, preserved a heart as superior to them as his condition would admit, paid his debt to Nature, Oct. —, 1756.

Many years ago he left his native air
to breathe in British Freedom;
and resigned his extensive territories in the East
for less ample possessions, where his reception
was more suitable to his merit.

Exalted above the ignoble crowd which surrounded him,
he maintained that native dignity which became a consciousness
of his superior excellence.

Endowed by nature with all the advantages
of person, he despised the arts of dress.

The same easy temper which softened the solitude of celibacy heightened his relish of the married state; and the same benevolence which distinguished him in society would have taught him the just discharge of parental duties had the care of posterity demanded.

He never plumed his wings to lofty flights,
nor sought the refinements of Art where Nature's
bounty could be obtained.

As he lived superior to ambition or interest, he fell no sacrifice to party rage or political malice; but, after the long enjoyment of unsullied reputation, withdrew
from the stage on which he had performed
his part so well.

Blush not, whosoever thou art, that with the poring eye of P. Gemsege[1] or W. Toldervey[1] does decypher these letters, to receive instruction from the example of a
PHEASANT.

[1] Two old and respectable correspondents of Mr. Urban (in *The Gentleman's Magazine*).

Only a man of singular thoughtfulness and sweetness of nature would thus go to the trouble of celebrating his pets.

Modern poetry contains many such tributes, notably Matthew Arnold's poems on Geist and Max, and Matthias the canary; but little of Gough's tenderness and solicitude had come between his own day and that of the bereaved gentlemen of the Greek Anthology, how many centuries earlier. That is to say, in literature; but, in fact, I suppose, men have always loved their pets with equal depths. There is a dead partridge in the Greek anthology: —

No longer, poor partridge migrated from the rocks, does thy woven house hold thee in its thin withies, nor under the sparkle of fresh-faced Dawn dost thou ruffle up the edges of thy basking wings; the cat bit off thy head, but the rest of thee I snatched away, and she did not fill her greedy jaw; and now may the earth cover thee not lightly but heavily, lest she drag out thy remains.

That pairs off with Mr. Gough's pheasant, and indeed may have given him his inspiration.

And here are two epitaphs on favourite dogs, also in Mr. Mackail's beautiful translation: —

Here the stone says it holds the white dog from Melita, the most faithful guardian of Eumelus; Bull they called him while he was yet alive; but now his voice is prisoned in the silent pathways of the night.

And

Thou who passest on the path, if haply thou dost mark this monument, laugh not, I pray thee, though it is a dog's grave; tears fell for me, and the dust was heaped above me by a master's hands, who likewise engraved these words on my tomb.

Richard Gough of course knew these, and, as I say, he very probably took his inspiration from them; but the circumstance does not diminish the beauty of his own affectionate thoughtfulness in composing epitaphs of his own and having them cut in the stone.

Nichols, who, of course, after his quaint manner, buries all the human characteristics of his antiquarian and scholastic friends in the small type of the footnotes, gives also a model address of a candidate to his constituents as prepared by Mr. Gough for a friend who thought to contest a seat. It is a brief but amusing document, obviously the work of a golden-hearted, pure-minded recluse, removed by nature and circumstances far from the turmoil of ambitious men. It runs thus: —

"I offer myself a Candidate to represent the County [or Borough] of ——, with a determined resolution neither to solicit, nor influence, the votes of the free electors. Superior to such influence myself, I cannot condescend to bribe or intimidate my countrymen. I stand forth, therefore, on no other ground than public virtue. If there is so much left in this place as to direct your choice to me, I shall be happy in calling it forth, whether I succeed in my election or not. I shall neither make nor authorize any other application than this. As I have no ends of my own to serve, I profess myself of no party; and resolved to follow the dictates of my own conscience, with respect to my duty,

to my Country, my Sovereign, and my Constituents."

When Mr. Gough himself came to die, his learned friend Dr. Sherwin said of him in *The Gentleman's Magazine* that "his cellar was as open to the necessities of afflicted industry as his noble library to the wants and wishes of literary men." A noble epitaph. Those great days have passed away. Gentlemen no longer have a Magazine, and many of them cut a fine enough figure without either library or cellar. Indeed, I am not sure that the tendency of the cellar to dwindle into a Tantalus is not the most lamentable sign of the times.

CHAPTER XII

THESPIS SENDS ME TWO REPRESENTATIVES ON THE SAME DAY AND MONOPOLISES OUR ATTENTION

I WAS sitting in my room at half-past ten wondering whether I should go to the Oval or to Lord's when a brisk rap sounded at the door, it was flung open, and in burst a dazzling, rustling creature.

"Oh, I beg your pardon!" she said. "I have come to the wrong room. I thought this was Miss Lestrange's room."

I saw who it was in a flash — it was Azure Verity. I told her that Miss Lestrange dwelt in some remote region of this wonderful expanding house to which I had never penetrated, and that if she would wait a moment I would ring for Mrs. Duckie.

"Mrs. who?" she asked, with an air of such perfect ingenuousness that I was caught at once.

"Duckie," I said, and then she laughed, and I no doubt blushed.

"Not really?" she inquired, laughing again.

"It is absurd, isn't it?" I said.

It has long been my theory that some of the best friendships are based upon a good initial *faux pas* or ridiculous misunderstanding. The freemasonry of laughter gets to work at once and does in an instant what it otherwise might take days or weeks to achieve.

"May I tell you," I asked, "who you are, and then we can introduce each other?"

"Certainly," she said.

"You are Miss Azure Verity, now acting with unparalleled success at the Princess's Theatre in Mr. Operin's new play, and you have come to see your dresser, who calls herself Miss Lestrange but is really Miss Duckie."

"Wonderful!" she cried. "You are a Zanzig. But," she added, "so am I. You know there are always two of them. Let me now do my turn."

I had long since decided that I would not ring the bell before it was really necessary.

"You are the gentleman," she said, "from abroad who has the beautiful niece, and reads old books all night, and talks to mother in the mornings about what London used to be like thirty years ago — the gentleman who promises to go to the theatre to see Miss Verity but never gets nearer than a music hall. Am I right, sir?" she concluded, with an adorably mischievous smile.

"Quite right," I said. "We are very extraordinary people, it is clear, and we ought to succeed as duettists."

"Yes," she said, "Falconer and Verity — thought-readers and clairvoyants. That sounds all right."

"Verity is indeed an inspiration," I added. "It would make the fortune of a palmist."

"Oh," she said, "don't make any jokes about my name. I am so tired of them. *Punch* did it again only last week. Please ring for Mrs. — Mrs. — Duckie," she added, "but before I go I want you to promise me something. Promise me that if I send you a box you will not only come to the theatre but bring your niece too. Will you promise?"

I promised, and Mrs. Duckie appearing, the apparition disappeared.

Be-trice's illness brought me a second meeting with her illustrious brother Alf Pinto. He looked in to see if she was well enough to be driven to Epping, and by his mother's wish came into my room.

I told him that I had heard him at the Frivoli, and he seemed to be as gratified as any other kind of artist would be. "But I've got a better song than any of those," he assured me, and forthwith sang it. I suppose that to be as assured as that is half-way towards the conquest of the world; but for my part I could as easily undress in a crowded drawing-room as sing an unaccompanied song. He fixed me with his bold, roguish eye throughout three long coarse verses and three inane choruses. And without any shame, too; but indeed how could he have shame, for there was none over:

I had it all. I had no notion where to look until he had done.

"That's a clinker, isn't it?" he said, and his words once more convinced me how needlessly we can suffer for others, for they proved him utterly oblivious to any confusion or want of appreciation on my part.

I temporised. "With proper costume and a full band it ought to go very well," I said; and I suppose it would, for the thing was as ugly and tawdry as the people want. Another exposure of marriage. The awakening after the raptures of courtship to the disenchantment of wedded life: the horror of crying twins and a bad-tempered wife and all the rest of it. The cruelty, the hateful ugliness, of this tireless delight in the ruin of the happiest of all human hopes!

"Why," I said, "do you always sing this kind of thing? Why is there no song about a happy marriage with some love and trust in it?"

"Where's the joke?" he asked.

"But surely," I said, "it could be made humorous or amusing enough. Surely there are families that have cheerfulness and gaiety as well as quarrels and poverty and drink. Look at your own father and mother."

"Not worth singing about," he said. "No fun in it."

I suppose this is so. People go to the music halls to laugh at, not smile with. They want a target, and apparently they are so constituted

that they never relate the experiences in the songs to their own lives. The shilling at the pay-box absolves them from thought, releases them from fact; they are in fairyland for the evening — or what stands for fairyland to them. Otherwise how could any member of the audience face marriage or paternity at all?

The odd thing is that, taking music-hall laughter as the test, the logical outcome is that if in England marriage were either abolished or became uniformly successful, and if we returned to a state of nature and called a spade a spade, there would be no humour left. Jokes came in with wives and clothes.

"Well," I said, "I'm sorry if cheerfulness is so impracticable. It would be new, at any rate, and novelty is said to be a great thing."

"Not in songs," replied Alf. "They don't want anything new in songs except the tune. They've all got to be about the same things for ever and ever."

But for all his ready-made cynicism and London brass, young Duckie is a decent fellow who seems to have character enough to be able to withstand the allurements of the bar. It is an odd way of making a living, but he works at it honestly and hard.

He receives sometimes, he tells me, as many as a dozen songs a day, none of them any good at all. "Do you mean all of them worse than the one you have just sung?" I said, rather unkindly.

But he saw no sting. "Yes," he said simply. "It is not so easy as it looks," he went on, "to sing even a good song; and to make a bad song, and they're mostly bad, go, wants hours of practice not only alone but with the band. The difficult thing to get is movement all the time." (He meant what a more accomplished artist would call the rhythm.) "It's not only that you've got to have a voice, but you've got to drive every word home too, and also keep it going."

This, I gather, is where the value of being unashamed comes in. The music-hall singer must be ashamed of nothing.

Our evening at the Frivoli to hear Alf had been, I suppose, a success, for we were all in good enough spirits; but with exceptions so rare and far between as to constitute oases which only made the desert the more arid, the performance was dull and stupid. But we had one half-hour of the real thing, when a little Scotchman swung on to the stage and sang three Scotch songs, with every line and every syllable telling. Curious songs, too, to come from that dour northern country, songs with an almost Oriental warmth in them and an infectious and irresistible glee. I sounded Alf about this little rival. He had no jealousy; he recognised supremacy and honoured it. "Oh yes," he said, "Lauder — he's a genius. He can do what he likes. There's no need for him to sing the old stuff. But he's almost the only one. All

the rest of us have got to give it to them. But," he added, "why do you bother about it, Mr. Falconer? Music-hall songs aren't written for you. Music-hall songs are written for the gallery and the pit, every one of them, and always will be."

"Well," I said, "that may be so, but I am interested none the less in improving them."

"Better leave it alone," he answered. "They're as good songs as the people deserve."

And perhaps he is right; but one's fingers get in the way of itching to alter so many things.

None the less I think that the music halls have improved since my young days. There are grimy-minded men still, but the *double entendre* is rarer than it was, and a measure of drollery has become important. Merely to roar out ugliness is not as sufficient as it used to be. The acrobatics, juggling, conjuring, and other exhibitions of skill are infinitely superior: so much so, indeed, that to see certain human gifts in perfection a visit to the music hall has become a necessity; while that curious modern extension of the illustrated newspaper — the cinematoscope — has also a real interest of its own, and takes the place of rubbish very satisfactorily.

Until this spring I had not been in an English music hall since January 1875. We made a final round of them just before I sailed for the Argentine. Thirty-three years ago! There were

not so many then, nor were those that we had under such intensely business-like control. The singer when he had finished in those days would take his glass in the hall: no tearing off in a motor car to perform again elsewhere. It was now and then even possible to get an encore; there is no such thing to-day. Everything is now cut and dried, and each performer contrives to do as little as possible, and is supported by his Union in that praiseworthy ideal.

Alf was interested in hearing of the old easier system. "I'd often like to give encores," he said, "but there's no chance. It would throw out the whole time-table. But it's a loss the singer can feel quite as much as the audience — only they don't know it." I liked him for saying that.

My last music hall was, I remember, on a Monday night, — I sailed on the Wednesday and spent the Tuesday night at home, — and it was a very special occasion — the benefit of Sam Adams, the manager of the Royal, in Holborn. I have since been in the Royal as it is to-day — it is called the Holborn Empire — and how changed! Two performances nightly, and not a single thing the same except its site. Sam had a red, impetuous face and curly hair, and a shirt front that, one felt, would cover the Oval.

I asked Alf Pinto about him, and found that his name was not even known; but Trist tells

me he is dead, and his own hall — the Trocadero, or Troc, as it was called by the bloods — has disappeared too, and is now a restaurant. Poor Sam! It is odd what flashes of insight one has. I remember thinking that night, in the midst of his triumph and all the jolly good-fellowship that sweltered round him, that he did not look as if marked out for happiness or longevity.

I cannot remember much of the evening, but George Leybourne was there with two or three slap-up songs, and Lieutenant Cole the ventriloquist, and Sam Redfern, a burnt-cork cynic, and Henri Clark, a comic singer, and an extraordinary couple named Ryley and Marie Barnum, who called themselves (to the total exclusion of George Fox) "the Original Quakers," the adjective made necessary, I imagine, by too successful imitation of their discreet yet mischievous caperings. Trist tells me that of these entertainers Leybourne is dead (to think that death should come also to Champagne Charley!), Henri Clark owns a music-hall in the Edgware Road, and Sam Redfern was recently in the bankruptcy court through inability to make a chicken farm pay. Well, well!

But if I can see no more of the performances of these variety stars, there are two or three actors still performing whom I saw that month during my farewell round of gaiety. Lionel Brough, who was then with Willie Edouin and Lydia Thompson in *Blue Beard* at the Globe, is still

playing, and Wyndham, who was in *Brighton* at the Royal Court, is active almost as ever; but James Thorne, whom I laughed at in *Our Boys* at the Vaudeville, Irving who was in *Hamlet* at the Lyceum, Buckstone and Sothern in *Our American Cousin* at the Haymarket — where are they?

We went to the Princess's — to the Royal Box, if you please — to see Miss Verity: Naomi and I, Lionel, and Dollie Heathcote with the very latest shirt and a dress suit watch no thicker than half a crown. Serious plays are as a rule not much in either Dollie's or Lionel's way: and Operin is now always serious, with his conscientious transcript of types from what is called real life (as if there were two kinds of life), who talk pedantic grammar and covet their neighbours' wives. Some day perhaps a playwright will arise observant enough to find other domestic difficulties as full of dramatic possibilities as this dreary formula of the *tertium quid;* but at present we are as much under its sway as the French nation are under that of their single joke. There are a thousand problems of daily life within the experience of every one that have as much drama in them as is needed. One would think that all England had nothing to do but break the seventh commandment; whereas those of us who do so are in a minute minority, and are not the especially interesting persons. Is there no material for drama in the lives of husbands who do not tire of their wives and wives who

do not tire of their husbands — the most enviable people of all, when all is said?

Both Dollie and Lionel, as I say, would rather have been at a musical comedy, but they had a very real desire to meet the famous Azure, and the evening promised an opportunity. Naomi was very happy to be at the play and to wear a new dress, neither event being too common with her; and as for me, I did not much mind, for once, although had I been alone I should probably have faltered at the theatre portico. I have too many points in common with Wang Hiu-Chih, one of the illustrious persons in my Chinese book, and the occupier of a high place on the roll of honour of the diffident. "On one occasion," it is recorded, "he went in the snow to visit a friend, named Tai Ta-k'uei; but on reaching the door he turned round and went home again. Being asked the explanation of this behaviour, he replied, 'I started full of spirits; when they were exhausted, I came back.'" So is it very often with me; I start out full of spirits, and when they are exhausted I come back. Probably there are no persons in London at this moment who in the past few months have seen so many first acts, and first acts only, as I have. It needs a very engaging dramatist or very acceptable performers to make me forget the allurements of the word Exit.

But on the present occasion I was on duty and in perfect order. At the end of the second

act a servant came summoning us to Miss Verity's dressing-room. Naomi would not go, try as I would to make her, but Dollie and Lionel hurried off with no attempts to conceal their pleasure. In a very few moments, however, they were back again, and Miss Verity with them — a rustle of femininity at high pressure. "If you don't come to see me, I must come to see you," she said very winningly to Naomi; and she sat down at the back of the box, well out of view, and talked away gaily and extremely well. Why she so wanted to make an impression on this quiet girl I did not understand; but I will venture the opinion that she had never worked harder to ingratiate herself with a man.

The *entr'acte* was not long, but long enough for her to wring from Naomi her consent to come to tea.

"You are very rude," she said to me as a parting shot. "You have never said how you like me in the play."

How I wish I was a better liar; or, in other words, less of an intellectual snob. I did not like her in the play, and I did not like the play. The simple natural thing under such conditions was to say, "You are absolutely delightful," but having a paltry vanity as to preserving pure one's twopenny-halfpenny critical sense, I said nothing, and instead was just awkward and offensive.

"Never mind, Mr. Falconer," said Azure, who divines swiftly, "don't say anything. Keep that conscience intact whatever happens."

And so saying she was gone, with Lionel and Dollie in attendance. Such is the vitality of her personality that it seemed for the moment as if she had taken all the air with her and we languished in a vacuum. But only for a moment or so.

"She is very attractive," said Naomi, with a little sigh. "It must be nice to have such power and be so popular."

I took her hand and stroked it.

Dollie and Lionel here came back, crushed their hats against their bosoms, and sat dawn.

"She's a ripper," said Lionel. "She's coming to see me play against Somerset to-morrow."

"Jolly awkward if you make a blob," said Dollie. "I've got her autograph."

"Where? I should like to see it," said Naomi.

"Here," he said, "on my shirt front. That means fifteen and six, for of course I shan't wear the shirt again. I shall have it framed. Isn't it jolly handwriting?"

CHAPTER XIII

I GO INTO BUSINESS *PRO TEM*, READ A GOOD POEM UNDER DIFFICULTY, AND LEARN SOMETHING OF WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A SECOND-HAND BOOKSELLER

I WAS writing letters at about noon, when Mrs. Duckie entered to see if I would be so good as to speak to Miss Wagstaff for a moment. Down I went, and found that bitter mercantile virgin all tears and trouble. She had a telegram to say that her mother was ill, and would she come at once; but Mr. Bemerton was in the country valuing a library, and who was to mind the shop? Could I make any suggestion?

I made the only natural one: I said I would mind it myself.

This apparently had not occurred to her, and it seemed to strike Mrs. Duckie (who is more jealous of the fair fame of what she calls gentlefolk than they themselves are likely ever to be) as an act of impropriety beyond pardon. But I had my way, and at last got Miss Wagstaff off in

a hansom; but not before she had showered instructions upon me.

"The prices," she said, "are marked just inside. They are all net, but if any one bought several books you might knock something off. Don't ever knock anything off a cheap book."

"Be very careful," she said, "with people who look at the illustrations. Sometimes they pinch the plates."

"Whatever you do," she said, "don't buy any books."

"Keep an eye," she said, "on the outside shelves."

"Don't let any one," she said, "stand too long reading."

"See that they don't slip one book into their pocket while they buy another," she said.

"Watch them," she said, "to see that they don't rub out our price and put in another themselves."

That, I think, was her very last counsel. I sank down in a chair in a kind of stupor. I had not been prepared for such revelations of perfidy. I had thought of a second-hand bookshop as being off the main stream of human frailty and temptation; and behold it was the resort of the most abandoned! Is there no natural honesty? I wished that Mr. Bemerton would return and liberate me to walk upstairs out of life again and get on with my make-believe.

It gave me at the same time a new idea of Miss Wagstaff, and I found myself admiring

her. How naturally she took these things; how simple and right it seemed to her that customers should be suspect; while I — I had been sunning myself in a comfortable sense of all-pervading virtue, and was now cowering beneath the discovery of the contrary — I, a man of fifty and more, who had some claims to be considered a cosmopolitan and citizen of the world, and she a Cockney spinster with no experience of anything but her home and this shop.

But a customer coming in, I had to suspend my reflections and attend to business, which in this case consisted in replying, with some decision, that we never bought last year's *Whitaker's Almanack*. The adaptability of man — how naturally I said "we"!

Apart from the necessity of replenishing his stock by attending sales and buying books; the wearing task of looking narrowly at larcenous fellow-creatures; the pangs that it must cost him to sell the books that he wants to keep; and the attacks made upon his tenderer feelings by unfortunate impoverished creatures with worthless books to sell; apart from these drawbacks, the life of a second-hand bookseller seems to me a happy one. I could myself lead it with considerable contentment. During my four hours of authority I took eleven shillings, met some entertaining people, discovered on the shelves a number of interesting books, and read at intervals a poem I had long known by repute but never had seen before — Walter Pope's "Wish."

A second-hand bookseller, I found, may read much in his time, but he cannot read continuously. My perusal of Walter Pope's poem was broken somewhat in the way I have attempted to describe. I got through the Horatian argument all right: —

"When I'm at Epsom or on Banstead Down,
Free from the Wine, and Smoke, and Noise o' th' Town,
When I those Waters drink and breathe that Air,
What are my Thoughts? What's my continual Prayer?"

and I was allowed to complete in peace the first stanza and the chorus: —

"If I live to be old, for I find I go down,
Let this be my fate in a country town:
May I have a warm house, with a stone at the gate,
And a cleanly young girl to rub my bald pate.

CHORUS

May I govern my passion with an absolute sway,
And grow wiser and better, as my strength wears away,
Without gout or stone, by a gentle decay."

But here entered a very small dirty boy to know if I could spare his mother a piece of stamp paper.

I said it was the one thing we didn't keep, and resumed the poem: —

"May my little house stand on the side of a hill,
With an easy descent to a mead and a mill,
That when I've a mind I may hear my boy read —
In the mill if it rains; if it's dry, in the mead.

Near a shady grove and a murmuring brook,
With the ocean at distance, whereon I may look,
With a spacious plain, without hedge or stile,
And an easy pad-nag to ride out a mile."

At this point there entered a rusty elderly man with a *Cruden's Concordance*, to know if I would buy it. I said we already had several, and I could not as a conscientious business man add to the stock. He sighed, surveyed me attentively, and went away, saying that he would bring something else. I implored him not to, but with an ineffable look of misfortune he shuffled away. I turned again to the page: —

"With Horace and Petrarch, and two or three more
Of the best wits that reign'd in the ages before;
With roast mutton, rather than ven'son or teal,
And clean, though coarse linen, at every meal.

With a pudding on Sundays, with stout humming liquor,
And remnants of Latin to welcome the vicar;
With Monte, Fiascone, or Burgundy wine,
To drink the king's health as oft as I dine.

May my wine be vermilion, may my malt drink be pale,
In neither extreme, or too mild or too stale;
In lieu of desserts, unwholesome and dear,
Let Lodi or Parmesan bring up the rear.

Nor Tory, or Whig, Observator, or Trimmer
May I be, nor against the law's torrent a swimmer;
May I mind what I speak, what I write, and hear read,
And with matters of State never trouble my head."

At this point a lady faltered in, saying she felt very faint, and might she sit down a moment. I gave her my chair, and called to Mrs. Duckie for some water. The lady told me her home was in Ashford, and she was only up for the day, having to get some things for her boy who was joining a merchant-ship, and did I know where Heronsgate Mansions were, because she had a

cousin living there whom she would like to see, and was there a good dentist in this neighbourhood, and could I tell her if the 4.43 to Ashford was still running.

Having at length resumed my chair, I proceeded with Walter Pope: —

> "Let the gods, who dispose of every king's crown,
> Whomsoever they please, set up and pull down;
> I'll pay the whole shilling impos'd on my head,
> Tho' I go without claret that night to my bed. . . .
>
> Tho' I care not for riches, may I not be so poor
> That the rich without shame cannot enter my door;
> May they court my converse, may they take much delight
> My old stories to hear in a winter's long night." . . .

The rusty man here came in again, and after spending a moment at the shelves, offered me another book, and pitched such a tale of woe that I bought it for myself. Two days afterwards, I may here remark, Miss Wagstaff came up to ask me if I had sold a copy of Rogers' *Italy* with Turner's plates while I was in charge.

"No," I said, "but I bought one."

She examined it swiftly, and informed me that it was their own copy which had been sold to me.

"He spotted you for a greenhorn all right," she said. "And had a starving family, hadn't he? And was only just out of the Brompton Hospital?"

I said it was so.

"Oh that Brompton Hospital!" she added. "Life would be quite simple if it had never been built. They've all got some one there when they want to sell a book."

I gave Miss Wagstaff the book again, and said I was very sorry.

"You'll always be taken in," she said, as she hurried off. "You go about asking for it."

Probably; but how can one say no to certain forms of distress, real or so well-managed as to seem real? After my experiences I know that it is not the disposal of books that presents the greatest difficulty to a bookseller, but the acquisition of them. At least I know that that would be the case with me. My difficulty would always be to refuse to buy the books which the unhappy persons brought in. A very little while after the shabby man had departed with his ill-gotten gains, a neat little old woman entered with a brown paper parcel which she undid with excessive deliberation and care, revealing at last a shabby copy of an odd volume of Rowe's *Shakespeare*. At the same time she took out of her purse a folded newspaper cutting and placed it in my hands. Then she looked at me with an expression in which excitement, hope, and fear were almost unbearably blended.

The wretched cutting, as I knew by inspired prevision, related to the sale of a first folio, which, after spirited bidding, was knocked down for £987. The pathetic figure before me had read the paper, had dimly remembered that among her

dead husband's books was an old Shakespeare, and at last, with a beating heart, had found it and seen infinite possibilities of debt-paying and comfort before her.

What was I to do? She was manifestly so truthful, and the hope dying out of her poor eager face left it so wan and wintry.

A second-hand bookseller, I suppose, having chosen to be a second-hand bookseller and to live by his choice, has a short way with such clients. I know he must have. But I wondered what Mr. Bemerton would do, that is, if Miss Wagstaff permitted him to come on in that scene at all. The disparity between anything that I could give her and the sum she was expecting was clearly so immense that I did nothing at all. I merely said I was very sorry, and bowed her out, and returned once more to Walter Pope.

"May none whom I love to so great riches rise
As to slight their acquaintance and their old friends despise;
So low or so high may none of them be
As to move either pity or envy in me. . . .

To outlive my senses may it not be my fate
To be blind, to be deaf, to know nothing at all;
But rather let death come before 'tis so late,
And while there's some sap in it may my tree fall. . . ."

Here a little girl from a neighbouring shop ran in to ask for two sixpences for a shilling.

"You won't buy a nice set of Dickens, too?" I asked her, quite in the Wagstaffian manner, I thought.

"Not to-day," she said gravely, with perfect

London readiness; "but mother'll be wanting the washing-book bound in morocco next week."

"With a courage undaunted may I face my last day,
And when I am dead may the better sort say:
In the morning when sober, in the evening when mellow,
He's gone, and not left behind him his fellow. . . .

I care not whether under a turf or a stone,
With any inscription upon it or none,
If a thousand years hence, 'Here lies W. P.'
Shall be read on my tomb; what is it to me?"

Here entered a studious-looking youth who wished to know if I had a copy of *Hoffding's Psychology*. I said no; and almost immediately after came a commanding matron with her daughter for a complete set of Trollope for an invalid son who was going a voyage to the Cape. I said I was sorry, but I could not tell whether I had one or not: I was not the real bookseller, and knew nothing of the stock.

"I call it disgraceful," said the lady. "Mismanagement on all sides. We've only just been to the Stores, and failed to get a pocket sextant. I can't think what's coming to London. Where are the standard novels kept in this shop?" she asked sternly.

"I have no idea," I replied. "Let's hunt for them together."

"Certainly not," she said. "I have no time," and off she marched; but not before her daughter, who looked as if she wished to sink into the earth for shame, had thrown me a glance of sympathetic compassion which was a perfect balm

for any wounds I might have received. And then I finished Walter Pope's poem: —

"Yet one wish I add, for the sake of those few
Who in reading those lines any pleasure shall take,
May I leave a good fame and a sweet-smelling name. —
Amen. Here an end of my wishes I make.

CHORUS

May I govern my passion with an absolute sway,
And grow wiser and better, as my strength wears away,
Without gout or stone, by a gentle decay."

That is the song which Benjamin Franklin sang, as he informed George Whately, a thousand times when he was young; "but now," he added, at fourscore, "I find that all three of the contraries have befallen me."

CHAPTER XIV

THE LINKEDNESS OF LIFE IS ILLUSTRATED, AND I BECOME A MONEY-LENDER

ONE of the strangest phenomena in this life of ours, I often think, is the way in which one thing leads to another. We million mortals may live alone, each in his sea of life enisled, but our influence on each other is continuous and remarkable, and — and this is the thought that pulls one up so suddenly — very often unconscious. It is not every pebble, so to speak, that we drop into the water that makes rings: the water is often already too restless to feel it; but the widening circumference of the rings that even an idler's stone can produce are almost terrifying to think of. The facile moralist would say that this being so, people of strong or attractive personality must be very careful: but to be careful is useless. A capricious fate more powerful than the vigilant self-protectiveness of any human being is in command.

I am led to these reflections by something that

happened at Bemerton's in the afternoon on that summer day. It was about a quarter to three, and Mr. Bemerton was due back at three exactly, when a nice-looking schoolboy of about fourteen, with a frank and courageous countenance, walked in carrying a book.

This he handed me, a little self-consciously, with a request to know if I could give him a shilling for it. It was *Hall and Knight's Algebra*, and inside was written Estabrook I.

Now I am no censor, but I have certain fixed theories as to the law of *meum* and *tuum* and the training of boys, and also some undimmed recollections of the financial straits of my own schooldays; moreover, I liked this boy's ingenuous face.

So I said, "The book is yours to sell, of course?"

"Oh yes," he replied.

"You bought it with your own money?" I continued Socratically.

"Well, I didn't exactly buy it with my own money," he admitted. "But it's mine: that's my name in it."

"A schoolbook," I said: "one that you use in your lessons?"

"I shan't want it again," he replied; "I go into another form next term."

"But you think you have a right to sell it, as it was brought for you and you only?"

"Oh yes, of course I do," he answered; "and I want a bob to-day most fearfully. We've got a

half-holiday, and it's the Yorkshire match at the Oval."

"You think your father would like to know that you are raising money on a schoolbook to go to a cricket match?" I asked.

"But I've done with it," he repeated.

"You think your father would like to know? That is the whole point. If you can assure me that he would not mind your selling the schoolbook like this just for an afternoon's pleasure, I will give you a shilling for it at once."

He thought a little while and shuffled his feet, and his fine face clouded.

"No," he said at last, "he wouldn't like it," and he put out his hand to take the book back.

"How much pocket-money do you get?" I asked, as I gave it to him.

"Threepence a week," he said.

"Well," I said, "I will lend you the shilling, and you can pay me back as soon as it is convenient."

"Oh, I say, how frightfully decent of you!" he exclaimed.

So I handed him the shilling, and he crammed the book into his pocket and rushed off, being joined just outside by a smaller boy whom I guessed to be Estabrook II.

Estabrook! Now you see the conjunction of ideas, for one of my closest companions at school forty years ago had been an Estabrook, and it is not a common name. Could this boy, I wondered, be the son of my old friend? I had not long to

wait to discover, for an unexpected tip from an uncle made it possible for him to discharge his debt quickly, and he was back within a week with the shilling in his hand.

Bemerton sent him upstairs to me, after having explained that I was not really the bookseller, but an eccentric gentleman masquerading as such; and I asked him at once about his father, and soon ascertained that it was really my old schoolfellow; and so I gave Kenneth, which was the debtor's name, a message to the effect that I should give myself the pleasure of calling upon him next Sunday afternoon. We agreed that nothing should be said as to the circumstances under which Kenneth and I had originally met: all we were to say was that we had come upon each other accidentally in Bemerton's. This harmless compact of secrecy made, as must so often have been the case, a very firm foundation of our friendship — a friendship which led to some very agreeable afternoons.

But see how it came about. The Rev. Ephraim Pye-Lipwood, tiring of horses, buys a motor-car of one of his parishioners. He goes for his first ride and forgets to put on enough wraps. He catches a cold, which develops into double pneumonia, and he dies. His widow wishes to sell his library, and asks a friend to recommend a good dealer. The friend recommends Mr. Joseph Bemerton of Westminster, and Mr. Bemerton arranges to go down by the 10.7 from Victoria on Tuesday.

He does so, leaving the shop in the capable hands of Miss Ruth Wagstaff. Meanwhile what does Miss Wagstaff's mother do? For a long time she has not been quite herself: ever since, in fact, she ate that pork chop at her sister's husband's aunt's. Nothing somehow has seemed to agree with her since; and her dyspepsia came to a head this very morning, at about half-past ten, just as Mr. Bemerton in his third-class compartment had finished *The Daily Telegraph.*

Hence the summons to Miss Wagstaff, and cause of my finding myself stationed in the shop all ready to deal with Master Kenneth Estabrook, and thus resume acquaintance with an old friend and make acquaintance with a delightful family. We never know when we are moulding destiny.

The Estabrooks have six children, for they belong to a generation that was not afraid of such liabilities. Estabrook is a stockbroker in a comfortable way, and they live in a large house in the Cromwell Road almost opposite the Natural History Museum, which is a regular Sunday afternoon resort in winter. The children are four boys and two girls. Kenneth is the eldest; then comes John, who is at Osborne, and has the proud privilege of calling Prince Edward of York "Sardines" (which is, I am told, the very natural nickname of one destined later to take his title from Wales, *i.e.* whales in schoolboy humour); then comes Christopher, who is at Westminster (Estabrook II); then Norah, aged ten; Winifred, aged eight; and Sam, aged six.

They seem to me very nice children, but a shade over-sophisticated, and with the modern touch of mockery. In my innocence I offered the youngest a beautiful piece of silver paper from a packet of tobacco, such as would have made me, at his age, feel something like a millionaire. But it had no attractions for him. His toys are ready-made, I imagine, and cost money.

After Kenneth, I think that my favourite is Norah, whom the others rather impose upon (it is ill to be the first girl in a family that already numbers three boys), and Norah, I think, likes me. I have already taken her to the Hippodrome, to the Zoo, and to the Exhibition; and I don't in the least see why she should not have a pony and ridé straddle-legged in the Park as the little girls now do. Little girls are little girls for so short a time: they have such a way of leaving the room frank, loving, uncalculating creatures, and returning in a few moments (so to speak) as women, with their hair up and their skirts down and views on art and music; that it behoves their elderly admirers to take advantage of all the opportunities of enjoying their society while they are still children.

Life is strangely suspicious and impatient of youth and candour and innocence and *naïveté*. Hardly does it perceive these exquisite qualities to exist than it rubs away their bloom with a rough finger. How often one longs for an arrested progress — for a little girl to go on being a little

girl a little longer; for the perpetual kitten of our dreams! But no; the Creator is not that kind of artist.

I took upstairs with me a fine copy of *Paterson's Roads*, a book I had not seen since the sixties, when I used often to pore over my father's copy and set forth on imaginary journeys from London to Truro, London to Norwich, London to Dover, London to Everywhere, with Paterson's aid. I remember how proud I used to be to find our own ancestor in the margin — John Murray Falconer, Esq., of West Wolves House, Long Melton, five miles north of Cirencester, my father's grandfather; and Winnington Oakes, Esq., of Masters Hall, just to the west of Evesham, grandfather of my mother. I had, indeed, an ambition at that time some day to be in Paterson myself, not knowing that the book was already outmoded, and that I was doomed to spend most of my life in a country where roads are chiefly tracks.

Paterson's noble book, once in every country house and most town houses, is now rare, but it remains the best outline account of England in existence. Publishers may vie with each other in bringing out guide-books, and highway-and-byway books, and atlases and gazetteers; but *Paterson's Roads* still conquers. Everything about the best edition of it is right: its arrangement, its type, its spaciousness, its interest in gentlemen's places, its little pictures of turnpike gates, its careful information; but most of all its period, before rails came in, when horses were still honoured,

and postboys never died, and innkeepers flourished.

Paterson may be said to pair off with Fielding. He is Fielding's courier, so to speak. Fielding has the romance; Paterson finds the roads and looks after the luggage and the horses. He is a companion to Pickwick, too: a serious, methodical Sam Weller. Spend an hour with Paterson, and you will have the England of Tom Jones and Samuel Pickwick before you; you will know it through and through. The period between these two books was Paterson's period. *Tom Jones* was published in 1749, *Pickwick* in 1837; Daniel Paterson was born in 1739 and died in 1825, living towards the end so quietly that Edward Mogg, who brought out a sixteenth edition in 1822 and dedicated it to George IV., referred to its true author as "the late."

Of Daniel Paterson little — far too little — is known, save that he was an officer and a gentleman. I have been looking him up. He was successively ensign, lieutenant, captain, major, and lieutenant-colonel of infantry. For a long time he was assistant to the Quartermaster-General at the Horse Guards, and in 1771 his road book was first published and dedicated to his superior officer. In 1812 he was made Lieutenant-Governor of Quebec, a post he still held at his death. There's a melancholy fate for the author of the best English road book. Quebec! It was probably due to this enforced exile that to Edward Mogg fell the task of bringing the great

work up to date; but he certainly ought to have known that its author was still living. Daniel Paterson's grave is at Clewer, near Windsor; but where he was born I know not.

One can open Paterson at random, sure to alight on some name that will quicken and kindle the memory. For example, I opened it last night at page 524 — and had good luck, coming at once upon the great name of John Warde. Page 524 is in the Cross-Roads section, and the gallant Colonel (assisted by Edward Mogg) is taking us from Maidstone to Guildford, by Westerham, Reigate, and Dorking. Against Westerham, a quiet Kentish town with some significance for himself, since it was there that Wolfe was born, — destined in time to make Quebec a city requiring a Lieutenant-Governor, — against Westerham he draws our attention to Squerryes, the seat of John Warde, Esq.; and is not John Warde of Squerryes one of Nimrod's heroes? "Whoever," says that large-hearted man, "heard him utter an ill-natured word respecting any one, living or dead? Where was there a kinder friend or a better neighbour? And, above all things, where was his equal as a companion?" That was the whole-hearted way in which sportsmen used to write of each other in the forties, before *Paterson's Roads* was quite out of date. "Rough as was his exterior, Mr. Warde was accomplished and well informed, and capable of adapting his conversation to any society into which he might be thrown. In short, it is a

matter of doubt whether there has existed a man whose name has not been long before the public either in the capacity of a senator, a soldier, a sailor, or an author, so universally known as Mr. Warde of Squerryes, in Kent, was to all Englishmen in all quarters of the globe." Such was John Warde, for fifty-seven years a Master of Foxhounds, and known as "The Father of the Field."

Mr. Warde did a little in the way of La Rochefoucauld and Vauvenargues, but his maxims rarely departed from sport, although, of course, a man who is qualified to write sound maxims for sportsmen is automatically qualified also to sum up life. Here are some of the sententiæ of John Warde, Esq., of Squerryes, Master of the Pytchley and other Hunts, as reported by Nimrod's pen: —

"Half the goodness of a horse goes in at his mouth."

"Never buy a horse from a rich man who hunts, or from a poor man till you have tried him."

"Never believe a word any man says about a horse he wishes to sell — not even a bishop."

"Never refuse a good dinner from home, unless you have a better at home."

"Never keep a drinking man — nor a very pretty maid-servant."

Most of the successful conduct of life could be secured by careful obedience to these five counsels.

Paterson's was by no means the first road-

book; but it is the best. Mr. Bemerton showed me the other day *Ogilvy's*, a delightful series of copper-plates, fourth edition, dated 1753. Every word in it is engraved, which makes reading sometimes a little difficult, but the effort is worth making. The great charm of the book is that all the journeys start from London, and the road is pictured the whole way. Every mile is marked. Thus the journey from London to Berwick, 260 computed and 339 measured miles, takes ten pages of three columns each. Nothing is needed but gradients and a few technical particulars to make it still perfect for the motorist. It would be an agreeable task to bring one of these books into line with the present day of machinery and petrol, — agreeable, although tinged with melancholy.

CHAPTER XV

MR. DUCKIE, WITH HIS NAPKIN ON HIS ARM, SUGGESTS A SCHEME FOR HUMAN HAPPINESS

TO-DAY I carried out my promise of lunching at the Golden Horn and testing the quality not only of the house's famous saddle, but also of Mr. Duckie's skill as a waiter. He had reserved a corner seat in one of the pews, and had evidently given orders to his assistant that I was to be well looked after: an agreeable attention, but carrying with it the necessary corollary, in an English eating-house, that other guests were neglected.

I was amused by a father and son who occupied the same compartment. This father was evidently of the Temple — a man of about fifty, and intensely proud of his son, a youth from Oxford, who, however, no matter what learning his head might hold, was too callow to fancy exhibitions of paternal interest — young enough to be self-conscious and vigilant as to form, and even, I am afraid, the least little bit in doubt

as to his father's satisfactoriness as a judge of life. He would grow out of such foibles, I think, for he had a good face. The core of the little comedy lay in the father's desire to let me, a stranger, into the secret of his son's success. He stood sufficiently in fear of the boy to refrain from talking to me about him, or indeed talking to me at all. Young Oxford, he knew instinctively, would not like that, and the honest fellow, who was clearly of a sociable communicative cast, with a very agreeable vein of naïve snobbishness, had to content himself by making such remarks to his son as carried important information with them.

His great chance, however, came at the end of the meal, at which the boy hitherto had been drinking water. "Will you have a glass of port, old man?" the proud father asked. Young Oxford consented, and when their glasses were filled, the father, with half a glance towards me to see that I was attentive, gave the toast, "Well, old man, here's to another First!"

After they had gone I was alone in the pew, and as the other customers' needs grew fewer, Mr. Duckie paused now and then by the table and talked to me. He had been there, he said, for twenty-four years.

"Then you have seen many changes?" I asked him.

No, he said, not there. Everything was the same. It was their strength to be the same. The young governor, he'd tried some new notions,

such as a foreign waiter or two, but it was a mistake. Gentlemen didn't like it. Gentlemen liked what they'd been accustomed to. Foreign waiters might be nippier with the plates, but gentlemen didn't like to have to teach them English. It was not that gentlemen wanted to talk much; but when they did talk they wanted to be understood and replied to in their own language.

Mr. Duckie was now head-waiter and proud of his post. I asked him if he was satisfied generally with his life.

He said that he was, except for tired feet; and now and then, he added, he could not help wishing that some one would invent a new joint. Beef and mutton, pork and veal, he said, that's all there is. When he first came there they had had venison once a week, but it had gone right out of favour. Gentlemen never inquired for it any more.

I asked him how he kept his temper when customers were unreasonable.

"Oh, that's all in the day's work," he said. "I know they don't mean it. It's not the gentlemen who are snappish, it's their empty stomachs. But there's less grumbling here than in any other eating-house in London," he said; "and I'll tell you for why. I know how to deal with them. All my men have instructions to take the order for drinks with the food, and execute it at once. That's the way to soothe them. In the ordinary restaurant, gentlemen aren't asked what they'll

drink until they've got their food, and even then there's a delay. It's that that sours them. They can't bear waiting. It's just the same with little crying babies. Give them the bottle and they're all right. Gentlemen aren't really difficult if you think a little."

"But I suppose," I said, "that there are always a few who can't be satisfied any way."

"Of course there are," said Mr. Duckie (who, by the way, sinks familiarly here to plain John); "but, Lor' bless you, we don't mind them. That's their way. If it wasn't — if they really meant all they said — they'd go somewhere else. But they don't, and so we just put up with it. Why, there's gentlemen so much in love with grumbling that they'd call for a toothpick after eating clear soup. It's their nature.

"It is not the gentlemen," he went on, "that break a waiter's heart; it's the kitchen. That's where our trouble is. It's cooks that ruin eating-houses. A cook who has a grudge against a head-waiter can cost his governor pounds and pounds a day. It's all in his hands; he can spoil things, or he can keep them back till the customers bang out in a fury. Just now we've got as nice a lot in the kitchen as you'd wish to meet in a day's march, but we have had some fair terrors. Gentlemen who blame waiters for being slow don't remember that the food has got to be cooked and served up, and that the waiter doesn't do either.

"But there;" Mr. Duckie said, "an empty

stomach can't remember everything. I often think this would be a better-tempered and happier world if we ate a little all the time instead of saving up our appetites for real meals. But speaking as a waiter, I can see it's best as it is."

"Does your son ever come and see you here?" I asked.

"You mean the comedian?" he said. "Yes, now and again. But I don't encourage him. I don't think it's a good thing for a father to wait on his son. Not that I think there's any shame in it, nor that I feel unwilling, knowing as I do what genius is. But it's not good for Herbert. It's better for young men never to see their fathers at a disadvantage; and suppose some bad-tempered gent was to be rude to me while he was here, and I of course not able to answer back or do anything (because of course waiters mustn't), that wouldn't be right, would it? — not a good thing for a son to see?"

"But he's a good son," I said.

"Oh yes, he's all right. But he's only twenty-five, and he's on the Halls, and he makes a lot of money. It's a strange life, different from anything we're accustomed to. They turn night into day, and they get all this applause, and everything's got to be funny, and you don't know where you are. And then, of course, he's got his touring to look after — a week here and a week there, all over the country. It wouldn't suit me. I'm all for regularity."

"Do you ever go and hear him sing?" I asked.

"Not much. The Halls aren't much in my line. I prefer real music. The Queen's Hall is my mark. There's a gentleman who comes here who gives me tickets for that, and when I've got a free evening — which is not often, for I wait at City dinners and such things most nights after we close here — off I go to a symphony. They're beautiful, and so soothing. We had Mr. Henry J. Wood here once, and I saw to it that he had a good lunch, I can promise you. I picked out his chop myself. But the man I'd like to wait on is Tchaikovsky. Wouldn't I enjoy looking after him? He'd go away hungry — I don't think."

"Tchaikovsky?" I said.

"Yes," he said. "The composer of the Pathetic Symphony. It's the most beautiful thing I ever heard. If you were to go to that you'd understand why, with the exception of a fatherly pride, I don't much care about Herbert's turns."

And here I bade him good afternoon, and took my way to Lionel's chambers, murmuring as I went —

"I want to know a butcher paints."

CHAPTER XVI

MR. DABNEY OF *THE BALANCE* MEETS MORE THAN HIS MATCH, AND FINDS A RESCUER

THE breakfast table, which is the Wynnes' Upper House, setting the seal, or otherwise, upon schemes that have been comparatively idly adumbrated at other times and in other places, having decided that Grandmamma, who had leanings towards literary men, would like to meet an author, it was agreed that I should bring Mr. Dabney to dinner on Saturday.

"Can't we get any one better than that?" Lionel asked.

"Mr. Dabney is very nice," said Naomi.

"I daresay," said Lionel; "but he's not known. What's he written?"

"He's an editor," I explained. "His paper is *The Balance*, a very courageous influential organ. Frank writes for it."

"Oh yes," said Lionel, "but Grandmamma isn't going to get excited over that. What's an editor? The world's full of them. They've got

one or two at Ludlow, I'll bet. What Grandmamma wants to meet is a fellow who writes books, novels. Can't you get hold of one of them? What about Jacobs? I shouldn't mind meeting him myself."

It was pointed out that we did not know Mr. Jacobs.

"Then we ought to," said Lionel. "What's the good of an editor anyway? Every paper seems to have a dozen of them. How would you like me to bring Plum Warner? — he's written loads of books."

Mr. Dabney, however, remained our only lion.

When the evening arrived, it looked as though Grandmamma and he were going to hit it off perfectly, and I began to feel quite happy about my introduction of this firebrand into the household.

"I hear that you are a writer," Grandmamma began, very graciously. "I always like literary company. Years ago I met both Mr. Dickens and Mr. Thackeray."

I saw the lid of Lionel's left eye droop as he glanced at Naomi. Mrs. Wynne, I gathered, was employing a favourite opening.

Mr. Dabney expressed interest.

"There are no books like theirs now," Grandmamma continued. "I don't know what kind of books you write, but there are no books like those of Mr. Dickens and Mr. Thackeray."

Mr. Dabney began to say something.

"Personally," Grandmamma hurried on, "I

prefer those of Mr. Dickens, but that perhaps is because me dear fawther used to read them to us aloud. He was a beautiful reader. There is no reading aloud to-day, Mr. Dabney; and, I fear, very little home life."

Here Grandmamma made a false move, and let her companion in, for he could never resist a comparison of the present and the past, to the detriment of the present.

"No," he said, "you are quite right." And such was the tension that Grandmamma's remarks had caused that the whole room was silent for him. "We are losing our hold on all that is most precious. Take London at this moment — look at the scores and scores of attractions to induce people to leave home in the evenings and break up the family circle — restaurants, concert rooms, entertainments, theatres. Look at the music halls. Do you know how many music halls there are in London and Greater London at this moment?"

"No," said Grandmamma sternly, "I have no notion. I have never entered one."

Lionel shot a glance at me which distinctly said, in his own deplorable idiom, "What price Alf Pinto?"

Mr. Dabney, I regret to say, intercepted the tail of it, and suddenly realised that he was straying from the wiser path of the passive listener. So he remarked, "Of course not," and brought the conversation back to Boz.

"Mr. Dickens," said Grandmamma, "did me

the honour to converse with me in Manchester in the sixties. I was there with me dear husband on business, and we stayed in the same hotel as Mr. Dickens, and breakfasted at the same table. The toast was not good, and Mr. Dickens, I remember, compared it in his inimitable way to sawdust. It was a perfect simile. He was very droll. What particularly struck me about him was his eye — so bright and restless — and his quick ways. He seemed all nerves. In the course of our conversation I told him I had met Mr. Thackeray, but he was not interested. I remember another thing he said. In paying his bill he gave the waiter a very generous tip, which was the slang word with which me dear husband always used to describe a *douceur*. 'There,' Mr. Dickens said, as he gave it to the waiter, 'that's ——' How very stupid! I have forgotten what he said, but it was full of wit. 'There,' he said —— Dear me!"

"Never mind, Grandmamma," said Naomi, "you will think of it presently."

"But it was so droll and clever," said the old lady. "Surely, Alderley, dear, I have told you of it?"

"Oh yes, mother, many times," said Alderley; "but I can't for the life of me think of it at the moment. Strange, isn't it," he remarked to us all at large, "how often the loss of memory in one person seems to infect others — one forgets and all forget. We had a case in Chambers the other day."

Their father's stories having no particular sting in them, his children abandoned him to their mother, who listens devotedly, and we again fell into couples.

But it was useless to attempt disregard of old Mrs. Wynne. There was a feeling in the air that trouble lay ahead, and we all reserved one ear for her.

"And Mr. Thackeray?" — Mr. Dabney asked, with an appearance of the deepest interest.

"Mr. Thackeray," said Grandmamma, "I had met in London some years before. It was at a conversazione at the Royal Society's. Mr. Wynne and I were leaving at the same time as the great man, — and however you may consider his writings he was great physically, — and there was a little confusion about the cab. Mr. Thackeray thought it was his, and we thought it was ours. Me dear husband, who was the soul of courtesy, pressed him to take it; but Mr. Thackeray gave way, with the most charming bow to me. It was raining. A very tall man with a broad and kindly face — although capable of showing satire — and gold spectacles. He gave me a charming bow, and said, 'There will be another one for me directly.' I hope there was, for it was raining. Those were, however, his exact words: 'There will be another one for me directly.'"

Mr. Dabney expressed himself in suitable terms, and cast a swift glance at his hostess on his other side, as if seeking for relief. She was talking, as

it happened, about a novel of the day in which little but the marital relation is discussed, and Mr. Dabney, on being drawn into the discussion, remarked sententiously, "The trouble with marriage is that while every woman is at heart a mother, every man is at heart a bachelor."

"What was that?" said Grandmamma, who is not really deaf, but when in a tight place likes to gain time by this harmless imposition. "What did Mr. Dabney say?" she repeated, appealing to Naomi.

Poor Mr. Dabney turned scarlet. To a mind of almost mischievous fearlessness is allied a shrinking sensitiveness and distaste for prominence of any kind, especially among people whom he does not know well.

"Oh, it was nothing, nothing," he said. "Merely a chance remark."

"I don't agree with you," replied Grandmamma severely, thus giving away her little ruse. "There is no trouble with marriage. It is very distressing to me to find this new attitude with regard to that state. When I was a girl we neither talked about incompatibility and temperament and all the rest of it, nor thought about them. We married. I have had to give up my library subscription entirely because they send me nothing nowadays but nauseous novels about husbands and wives who cannot get on together. I hope," she added, turning swiftly to Mr. Dabney, "that those are not the kind of books that you write."

"Oh no," said Mr. Dabney, "I don't write books at all."

"Not write books at all?" said Grandmamma. "I understood you were an author."

"No, dear," said Naomi, "not an author. Mr. Dabney is an editor. He edits a very interesting weekly paper, *The Balance*. He stimulates others to write."

"I never heard of the paper," said Grandmamma, who is too old to have any pity.

"I must show it to you," said Naomi. "Frank writes for it."

"Very well," said Grandmamma. "But I am disappointed. I thought that Mr. Dabney wrote books. The papers are growing steadily worse, and more and more unfit for general reading, especially in August. I hope," she said, turning to Mr. Dabney again, "you don't write any of those terrible letters about home life in August?"

Mr. Dabney said that he didn't, and Grandmamma began to soften down. "I am very fond of literary society," she said. "It is one of my great griefs that there is so little literary society in Ludlow. You are too young, of course, Mr. Dabney, but I am sure it will interest you to know that I knew personally both Mr. Dickens and Mr. Thackeray."

Here a shudder ran round the table, and Lionel practically disappeared into his plate. I stole a glance at Mr. Dabney's face. Drops of perspiration were beginning to break out on his forehead.

"Mr. Dickens," the old lady continued remorselessly and all unconscious of the devastation she was causing, even at the sideboard, usually a stronghold of discreet impassivity, "Mr. Dickens I met at a hotel in Manchester in the sixties. I was there with me dear husband on business, and we breakfasted at the same table. Mr. Dickens was all nerves and fun. The toast was not good, and I remember he compared it in his inimitable way to sawdust."

Mr. Dabney ate feverishly.

"I remember also that he made a capital joke as he was giving the waiter a tip, as me dear husband always used to call a *douceur*. 'There,' he said ——"

Mr. Dabney twisted a silver fork into the shape of a hair-pin.

It was, of course, Naomi who came to the rescue. "Grandmamma," she said, "we have a great surprise for you — the first dish of strawberries."

"So early!" said the old lady. "How very extravagant of you, but how very pleasant." She took one, and ate it slowly, while Mr. Dabney laid the ruined fork aside and assumed the expression of a reprieved assassin.

"'Doubtless,'" Grandmamma quoted, "'God could have made a better berry, but doubtless He never did.' Do you know," she asked Mr. Dabney, "who said that? It was a favourite quotation of me fawther's."

"Oh yes," said Mr. Dabney, who had been

cutting it out of articles every June for years, "it was Bishop Berkeley."

The situation was saved, for Grandmamma talked exclusively of fruit for the rest of the meal. Ludlow, it seems, has some very beautiful gardens, especially Dr. Sworder's, which is famous for its figs. A southern aspect.

At one moment, however, we all went cold again, for Lionel, who is merciless, suddenly asked in a silence, "Didn't you once meet Thackeray, Grandmamma?"

Naomi, however, was too quick for him, and before the old lady could begin she had signalled to her mother to lead the way to the drawing-room.

By the time the evening ended, Mr. Dabney had quite recovered, and he was ready enough on the way home to laugh at his adventure. We talked Dickens long into the night; and there is no better subject. Mr. Dabney said one very interesting thing. "What I always wonder about Dickens," he said, "is how on earth did the man correct his proofs?" Because, as he went on to point out, between the time of writing and the time of correcting he must have thought of so many new descriptive touches, so many new creatures to add, so many new and adorable fantastic comments on life. How could he deny himself the joy of putting these in? — for there can be no pleasure like that of creation.

I went to bed still laughing — but I should not have laughed had I known what possible danger for me lay ahead, the product of that comic

dinner conversation. Strange at what light and unconsidered moments the strongest mesh of the web of life may be spinning! We never know. Had Mr Dabney not needed rescuing, and had Naomi not come to his rescue. . . .

CHAPTER XVII

IN WHICH, AFTER EXCEEDINGLY TEDIOUS TALK ABOUT THE WISE EXPENDITURE OF SUPERFLUOUS CASH, AN IDLER IS SET TO WORK

"RICHES," said Miss Gold, "are a great responsibility. I want to be altruistic, but I want to be sure — or as sure as possible — of the money going in the right way."

Trist, who had come down to Esher with me, smiled cynically.

"There are hospitals and so forth, I know," Miss Gold continued, "but this mere writing of cheques seems to me such a cowardly thing. I feel that one ought to think so hard before every gift. I not only feel that, but I must confess to wanting a little fun for my money too. The solving of the problem how to spend it wisely is indeed my chief hobby."

"A very fascinating one," I said.

"Yes," she replied, "so fascinating that when people calling here say, 'Oh, Miss Gold, how kind and charitable you are!' I blush, because

I know that although it may look like kindness and charity it is really nothing whatever but self-indulgence."

"My dear Miss Gold," said Trist, "my dear Miss Gold, may I implore you not to begin that. Between us three, let it be understood from the outset that there is no such thing as unselfishness."

She laughed. "Very well," she said, "but, none the less, the thought is with me continually. I take it for granted one minute, and the next I am up in arms against it."

"If you are at all troubled about small benefactions," I said, "I must bring Miss Wynne to see you. She could help in the little ways so very sensibly."

"I should love to see her," said Miss Gold. "Every one whom one can trust to do a few little things is so valuable; but it is the large sums that are the hardest nuts to crack. I have so much, you know, and I can spend so little. This house costs practically nothing; I want no clothes; the doctor is almost my heaviest expense, and really I could do without him, because whether he comes or whether he doesn't this thing has got to go on getting worse. That is fixed."

My poor Agnes.

"I have had the most fantastic ideas," she hurried on. "I'll tell you of one of them. You know Burns's lines about resisting temptation? They're in that green book on the second shelf, there; the fourth from the end. It is

Cunningham's edition, and came from your shop. The book-mark is in the place."

I found them.

"Read them aloud," Miss Gold commanded.

I did so —

"Then gently scan your brother Man,
Still gentlier sister Woman;
Tho' they may gang a kennin' wrang,
To step aside is human:
One point must still be greatly dark,
The moving *Why* they do it;
And just as lamely can ye mark
How far perhaps they rue it.

Who made the heart, 'tis *He* alone
Decidedly can try us,
He knows each chord, its various tone,
Each spring, its various bias:
Then at the balance let's be mute,
We never can adjust it;
What's *done* we partly may compute,
But know not what's *resisted*."

"Well," she said, "what do you think I did? I wrote to a thousand clergymen, chosen at random from the directory, and asked if I might be allowed to defray the cost of having these lines suitably illuminated in gold in some part of their church. Many did not answer at all; others refused straightforwardly on their own responsibility; many said that they themselves would like to give permission, but their bishops would not approve. One only asked me to do it, and I did it; but I have a notion, from the report of a spy that I sent down, that a hatchment has since been hung over it."

"You might," said Trist, "have offered to strike a bargain with them. In place, for example, of the tenth commandment, which was devised for the well-being of an Eastern tribe in camp, and has no bearing whatever at the present day in a civilisation that demands Sunday labour of most kinds, from cooking to shunting, and is broken perhaps most flagrantly by the clergymen who enunciate it at so much a year (yes, and call it work too, holding their poor foreheads as they tell you of their weary life) — you might have offered Burns's lines in place of that. Burns at any rate touches real life, whereas the presence of that law on the walls of the chancel has merely an archæological value."

"Yes," said Miss Gold, "but we must not look for logic."

"Nor," said Trist, "in a social society like the Church for courage."

"I don't blame the clergymen," I said. "They have to live. Better, they very properly thought, go on with elemental condemnations than let in the thin end of such a dangerous wedge as imaginative understanding."

"The New Testament," said Trist, "will never catch up with the Old in this country. The Old is certainly the best from the point of view of men who have to bring up families. Trade unionism must be very wary, and look ahead."

"Why didn't you go on to offer the verses to the Nonconformists?" I asked.

"I was discouraged," she said. "That is one

of the temptations to which I most easily fall a prey — discouragement. I felt I could not reopen the project."

"You might have given it a turn," I said. "For example, in my Chinese book it is written of Wang Kung-i, of the seventh century A.D., that on being asked by the Emperor Kao Tsung to explain the secret of the harmony in which three generations of his family had lived, he wrote the single word 'Forbearance' many times. You might have offered them that anecdote, and entitled it 'A Lesson from a Heathen Land,' and therefore, even if apposite, negligible here. Every one, then, would be pleased."

"Of course," said Miss Gold, "money is really the last instrument with which benevolence, charity, altruism, whatever you call it, works; but most of us, being in a hurry, put it first. The first really is thought. I will give you an example of what I call the truest thought for others, and one which to my mind, if not to the Röntgen-rayed eye of a cynical bachelor, really involves self-sacrifice. I have a friend who spends a great deal of her time — how do you think? In writing letters to prisoners in the gaols. They are pious letters, full of appeals to the better nature and reminders of Christ's loving-kindness and the chance that remains to every one. They must, to a large extent, merely reproduce the ordinary solace that is offered by the chaplains and visitors; but this lady writes them herself, very carefully and legibly, and she employs

several of her nieces to paint flowers on the top of each piece of note-paper. She is a wealthy and an intellectual woman, and might be much more congenially employed: but she does this because she wants to do something to alleviate the lot of the outcast. It seems to me a very beautiful deed."

"How I envy her!" I said.

"Envy?"

"Yes, her singleness of mind. I could not do it; not only because I should not dare to offer such solace, but also because my sympathy would be too much with them. I should feel, in the case of so many, that their imprisonment was the real offence rather than the so-called crime that took them there, and that would stay my hand. The letter that I should write would be a letter that would never pass the governor's office. Take, for example, a starving man who stole bread, and is in prison for that. It would be too cruel a mockery to comfort him with evangelical maxims. Hunger comes before conduct and far before religion. Another man might be there for debt, which is quite as often the result of accident as turpitude. Another might have merely killed the middle-aged seducer of a child of tender years. It is too difficult. I am too uncertain."

"Yes," said Miss Gold. "I am a little like that too; we are too complex for charity, you and I. In all probability we are merely meddling busy-bodies, groping towards what we hope is light, but doing harm by the way."

"I agree with you entirely," said Trist, who had been silent for some time. "My suspicion is that no one can do anything for any one; and my belief is that certain persons with soft hearts are doomed to ruin where they would assist. Most of the charitable are wreckers — certainly the cheque-writers are, and certainly I am. I have proved it again and again; but I shall probably go on, since resistance is so difficult and one is usually so much wiser than one's deeds. I will give you an example. I once did such an apparently harmless thing as to give a tailor's assistant a season ticket for Earl's Court. It admitted one only and he could not afford a shilling a night for his wife; he went every night alone; their home life was interrupted and then destroyed, and they have never been happy since. That, of course, was an error on my part. Had I thought a little longer I should have realised that the ticket was putting him, as the saying is, above himself, and have held my hand.

"That is one example. I could give you many others," Trist continued, "all of which convince me that I am a danger to society and ought to be locked up for giving money away as surely as any of your kind friend's prisoners are locked up for abstracting it."

"This is very terrible," said Miss Gold.

"Well, I believe it to be true of myself," Trist said; "others may have better fortune; but for the most part the feckless should be left alone.

It sounds brutal, but after my experience you will acquit me of wishing to speak brutally. England, as I said before, is an Old Testament country, and had better be left to it. Christianity meddles."

"That means," I said, "not the cessation of charity but the materialisation of it. Manna and quails once more. And a very good thing too."

"Certainly," said Miss Gold.

"Those stanzas of yours," I went on, "might have a serious undermining influence on the single-minded. Is it worth while to interfere with such an accepted beatitude as 'Blessed are the untempted, for they shall be accounted the best men?'"

"Yes," said Trist, "but that expresses only part of the case. The real wording should be, 'Blessed are those who escape the prohibited temptations, for they shall be reputed the best men.' Avarice, for example, which the author of the beatitudes loathed with all his magnificent loathing, has become a very popular and highly esteemed temptation. A man indeed practically writes himself down both fool and failure if he does not succumb to it.

"Meekness also has gone out, although my own private opinion is that when Christ extolled the meek and promised them their inheritance, he was speaking ironically (as he often must have been), and the earth they were to inherit was a piece six feet by two."

Miss Gold liked that. "You should write a commentary," she said. "We want every point

of view to be expressed, whether it's right or wrong; and I imagine," she added, "that no honest point of view can possibly be wholly wrong."

"As to temptation," I said, "take my own case. In the ordinary usage of the word, I am from temptation almost wholly free. I have the good or ill fortune to possess a mind that can occupy itself happily almost without a break, like a bee in that herbaceous border out there. Vice does not beckon me with any alluring finger; I am ill at once if I over-eat; I am ill the next day if I drink too much; and I care more for health than for the immediate pleasure of such excesses. I have a sufficient income; I do not desire more. I have no tendency to be a scandal-monger. The result is, that I am accounted a good man; the nice gentleman over Bemerton's, they probably call me in the neighbourhood; very likely mothers point me out as a model. But I am not deceived. I know perfectly well that the certificate is based not as it should be on what I do but on what I do not do. It is a negative honour that I enjoy or endure. Every time a wretched, besotted tippler tramples down the craving to have another drink, and thus saves twopence for his wife, he is a better man than I, who have no craving to conquer — except the craving (if I can apply to it so strong a word) not to have any craving; and that I submit to. Do you remember, Trist, that we were discussing this very question some years ago at Bentley's, and I claimed to have no temptations, when a shrewd being who knew me

well remarked, 'Oh yes, you have, Falconer; your temptation is to be tolerant; you can find little twopenny-halfpenny faults with things, but you can't condemn.' Do you remember that? It was true then, and it is even more true now, when I am many years older. If a man can't condemn at twenty-five, he certainly will not at fifty, when he knows so much more of life and more than ever is conscious of the other side. Angels have their advocate as well as the devil, and both perhaps are unfair. The superficial may call me good, but before God I am only amiable."

"And yet," said Trist, "there was a fallacy in the criticism, for to be tolerant or intolerant is not a matter of will. When the drunkard tightens his fist on his twopence, and walks resolutely away from the public-house, he is deliberately resisting temptation at the command of his own will. Similarly, when a reviewer refrains from saying too hard a thing, for justice, about a book by a man whom he dislikes, or too kind a thing, for justice, about a book by a man whom he likes, he is deliberately resisting temptation at the command of his own will. But it is not a matter of will with you to be tolerant. It is temperament. And you are tolerant because you never made up your mind as to right and wrong."

"And never shall," I said. "As a child I had no doubts; but now? Take, for instance, telling the truth. I was brought up to believe that one should do that, and I knew a lie a mile off.

But now I see that mendacity, or at any rate the suppression of one's real feelings and opinions, is the cement that binds society together."

"And yet truth," said Miss Gold, "is the only really interesting thing. But I have had enough ethics for one day, particularly as everything that Mr. Trist says is directed against the usefulness of the only hobby I possess. Tell me, Mr. Trist," she went on, "would you think this a dangerous scheme? — to hang one good picture, not an original, of course, but a really fine reproduction, in every common room of every workhouse in England."

"No," he said, "not even with a microscope could I find peril in that."

"Well," she said, "if I give you *carte blanche*, will you do that for me and so get back a little belief as to your usefulness? Will you find the pictures and arrange for their framing? I will communicate with the Guardians, because I know you could never bring yourself to do that. But will you help me over the pictures?"

And Trist said he would.

"I shall have a little work for you very soon, Kent," Miss Gold said to me as we left. "It is time you did something."

CHAPTER XVIII

WE ASSIST AT A FUNCTION IN THE MODERN SMITHFIELD, BUT NOT QUITE TO THE DEATH

"DO come at once. Drusilla has been arrested."

So ran the frenzied pencil note in Naomi's hand, on the fly-leaf of a new novel, which was brought to me one morning by the boot and knife boy at Queen Anne's Gate.

I went immediately, accompanied by the boy, who evidently knew what was wrong.

"Miss Drusilla and the other Sufferagettes," he said, "have been having another turn-up with the Prime Minister. They keep the pot boiling, don't they, sir?"

"Do you think women ought to have the vote?" I asked him.

"My mother says," he replied, "that all the clever women have it already."

"Has she got it?" I asked.

He grinned. "I should rather say she had," he answered.

Drusilla's mother was in a state of profound dejection and semi-collapse. "I don't know what Alderley will say," was the burden of her lament.

I told her it was very fortunate he was away. He would have time to think it over and take a kindly view.

"A daughter of mine in prison," said my sister. "The shame of it."

"Oh no," I said, "not at all. There is no shame in political offence. The fight for freedom, you know. Think of Joan of Arc. Think of — of — Jael and Sisera. Some one must always suffer before justice is done."

This cheered the poor mother a little, but all my good efforts were undone by Lionel, who rushed in at this moment, pale with fury. Neither Naomi nor I could check his ravings for some minutes, and his mother accepted them as a true picture of the case. Naturally. Was he not her son, while I was only her step-brother twice his age?

Lionel, I need hardly say, disregarded the seriousness of the cause of female enfranchisement. His principal concern was the name of Wynne, and L. Wynne in particular, and the effect of Drusilla's martyrdom upon it. How could he walk to the wicket, in the Middlesex and Surrey match to-morrow, with the knowledge of this outrage not only in his own mind but only too evidently in that of every spectator at the Oval? How could he do himself justice as a bat under such a humiliation? And think of

the report the next day — "Wynne, the brother of the notorious Suffragette, secured a well-merited duck," or, "To be 'caught out' seems just now to run in the Wynne family." Lionel's fancy played with the theme like a comic journalist in an evening paper. He covered himself with gratuitous ridicule.

"My dear boy," I said at last, "how extraordinarily out of date you are. You are making two of the least pardonable mistakes of your age — you are taking something seriously and you are disregarding the benefits of advertisement."

He turned on me like a tiger. "Oh yes," he said, "you never find fault with anything. You just smile and enjoy it."

"I can't find much fault with Drusilla," I said humbly, "because she is sincere. There is no harm in wanting to be considered more important than you are: it is not wrong to want to vote. Personally I hope I shall never vote again, but that is not virtue in me — it is deplorable, unpatriotic weakness. Drusilla takes a passionate interest in public affairs and wants to be allowed to participate in them, and considers it an injustice that she should not be allowed to because she is a woman and not a man. In her excitement for this cause she and her friends seem to have gone a little too far and have come into collision with a law and the police. That is all. There is no disgrace; on the contrary, it is a merit in any one to-day to be ready to suffer for any cause."

Seeing that I might as well be talking to a pillar box, I stopped there, although it also occurred to me to say that I could imagine an intelligent Japanese looking with more admiration upon sisters who wanted votes than brothers who struck and pursued a ball all day.

I did, however, add, "Instead of ranting about your own reputation as a cricketer, you ought to be hurrying as fast as you can to the police court, to bail her out — if she will let you, which I doubt — and be rather proud to think that you have so determined and plucky a sister. I will come with you if you like."

Lionel, I regret to say, replied briefly that he would be damned if he did anything of the kind, and so I went alone, as Naomi could not leave her mother.

What nice people the police are! To the well-to-do and law-abiding they have a quiet, gentle, paternal way that soothes and reassures. They write things in books like recording angels. They hold out hope.

"Miss Drusilla Wynne? Oh yes," said the officer in charge. "Taken into custody for creating a disturbance in Downing Street with other females. The magistrate will hear the case in about half an hour. A special sitting."

Yes, he added, I might see her; but they were all very excited, and had been singing their war-song.

A policeman led me to Drusilla's cell and told me the story on the way. It seemed that

the Prime Minister had made an announcement unpalatable to the sisterhood, whose knife, the officer added, had been in him for some time, and certain picked heroines among them had paid him a call of protest.

"No harm in that," said A-27, "but they wouldn't go away when told, and created a disturbance, so we had to bring them to the station. Very voilent they were, too, some of them; but not your young lady, I hope. Let me see, what did you say her name was?"

I told him.

"Oh yes. Wynne," he said (and my thoughts flew instantly to poor Wragg in Arnold's preface), "Wynne. No, she was all right — went like a lamb. In point of fact, I apprehended her myself. A pretty little piece in green and terra-cotta. Seemed to me she was doing what she was told, more than what she wanted to."

Poor Drusilla — if she could have heard that! Nothing so enrages as truth.

I was allowed to talk to her in the presence of the constable, who, with his helmet off, had quite the air of a man and a brother — a far more sympathetic brother than Lionel, indeed.

"I'm very sorry," she said, "but I can't pay the fine. None of the others will, and I'm not going to desert them."

"Does that mean Holloway?" I asked the policeman.

"That's right," he said: "Holloway."

"In Black Maria?" I asked.

"That's right: Black Maria," he said.

"How long do you think it will be?" I asked.

"A week or ten days for the first offenders," he said; "a fortnight for the old parliamentary hands."

I told Drusilla about her mother; but it did not move her. "It is mother's battle we are fighting as well as our own," she replied. "Women should hang together."

"Not hang," I said: "it's not as bad as that."

A-27 laughed, and Drusilla turned on him furiously.

"Why should policemen be men?" she cried. "That's another injustice. If women have to be arrested, they ought to be arrested by their own sex."

"I quite agree with you, miss," said the constable. "And so would all my mates, very heartily. Yes, and all our missuses too. It's no bean-feast taking a woman to the station, I can tell you. The police have their feelings as well as any one else, and they never feel so little like men as they do when they're apprehending a female offender. Now you, miss, as I was telling this gentleman here, came along quiet and peaceable; but do you think I was proud of having my hand on you? Not a bit of it. I could have sunk into the earth for shame. Votes for women I don't believe in, and never shall; but policewomen for women I would plump for."

At this moment a messenger came to say that the magistrate was ready, and I had to leave

Drusilla and enter the court. The hearing took only a short time. There were several offenders, some of whom had been in similar *mêlées* before. They all refused to pay the fine and received varying sentences, as A-27 had foretold.

Drusilla, however, was discharged with a caution, a result due partly to her pacific behaviour with her constable, and partly, I have no doubt, to her father's standing at the Bar; for although there may not be (as some aver) one law for the rich and one for the poor, there is certainly one law for a colleague and one for a stranger, and so there always will be. As Trist says, the human organism presents few attractions as a resting-place to the bacillus of impartiality.

In discharging her (to her very obvious distress), the magistrate made some kind if antiquated remarks. He pointed out that there were other rights to be considered as well as the right to vote. There were, for example, the parents' right to be free from anxiety as to what their daughters were doing; the right to be exempted from such annoyance and grief as the imprisonment of their daughters would bring; and so forth. He meant well, but Drusilla was white with disagreement and indignation.

"If every one thought about others like that," she said, on the way home, "there would be no progress whatever. Progress is based on disregard of old-fashioned feelings." (Where did she get that?)

"True enough," I agreed. "But progress also

comes from independence. I take it for granted that all those other brave ladies who have refused to pay their fines, and have gone to Holloway, have their own homes and incomes. They are in a position to defy the law. But where is your income? where is your home?"

This hit Drusilla rather hard. "If it came to that," she said, "I would leave home at once and earn my own living."

"But you have not done so," I said, "and one cannot have it both ways. One cannot enjoy both the sheltered advantages of the dependent and the fierce joys of the independent. You have been a gambler this morning. You were playing a game which might cost you money you did not possess and would have to be paid by some one who disapproved of the whole thing."

"But I was prepared to go to prison," said Drusilla.

"Quite true," I said. "But what about your time there? It does not belong to you. Your father paid for you to be at the Slade. No," I said, "you are a dependent and must behave accordingly. But when you earn your own living, there is nothing you cannot do. If you still want the vote, and there is no other way of getting it but by encamping on the Prime Minister's doorstep, why, you must encamp there and I will help you. But so long as you are taking your father's money, and living under his roof, I fancy you must behave."

And so I restored her to her mother.

My next step was to return swiftly to the police court to try a little corruption and bribery; but I am not good at this, and my suggestion that Wing was the correct spelling of Drusilla's surname (I had not only her father's comfort but her grandmother's in mind) failed dismally. In this world, although deceptions are welcomed everywhere, it is only on certain conditions, one of which is that they must be carried through with a high hand. I did not comply with this rule; and when I began to fumble for a sovereign, the inspector's cold eye paralysed my fingers. So Wynne it remained — Drusilla Wynne, aged twenty-two.

Alderley, as it happened, said nothing, but he acted promptly. He told Drusilla very kindly but decisively that he did not want her to go to the Slade any more. He would find her private instruction, he said, or perhaps she might join a class in a studio, but he wanted the Slade lessons to cease. This was very hard, and I sympathised with her; but, as I pointed out, and I am sure Naomi did too, her father had the right to dictate, and one cannot expect to be a revolutionary on plum cake, so to speak.

So Drusilla fared to Gower Street no more; and as for the little bearded men with the blue shirts, they gradually disappeared and no doubt found other comrades, as artists and socialists quickly do.

The chief cause of anxiety at Queen Anne's Gate that then remained was old Mrs. Wynne.

Could the news be kept from her? We wondered for a few days, and then at last her daughter-in-law knew the worst, for a letter from Ludlow arrived with reference to the matter.

"How strange," the old lady wrote, "that there should be two girls of the same age named Drusilla Wynne, for Drusilla is by no means a common name, and there has been a Drusilla Wynne in our family for generations. My eye caught it in a report of the deplorable incident proceeding from this new outcry. Another strange thing is that this other Drusilla Wynne is described as the daughter of a well-known barrister; but life is full of coincidences. You must remind me, when I see you next, to tell you of a very remarkable one which has just happened to me in connection with a knitting-needle and dear Canon Hoadley."

"So that's all right," said Drusilla's mother.

"Yes, and jolly lucky," said Lionel.

"I think," said Drusilla, "it's all wrong. You talk as if I were ashamed of it as well as all the rest of you, but I'm not, and I think it's horrible to deceive Grandmamma like that. In fact I shall blame myself as long as I live for letting Kent interfere at all."

"You couldn't help it," I said meekly.

"If you hadn't gone to the court," said Drusilla, "to see the police and talk the magistrate over" (the woman's view of the English law!) "I should have gone to prison, and then Grandmamma would certainly have known. I wish I had stopped you.

The next time I shall go through with it, I promise you, so you'd better all look out. Meanwhile, I shall write to Grandmamma and tell her everything."

"Don't be such an ass," said Lionel.

"My dear child," said her mother, "do you really think that is necessary?"

"Really," replied Drusilla firmly.

"Oh, Kent," said her mother to me, "do convince her how unnecessary that is. Poor Grandmamma — at her age too! Surely there is no need. I don't want ever to interfere in a case of conscience, but surely there are times . . . Truth. . . . Surely now and then silence . . . and it's too difficult. Kent, you know what I mean, do tell her."

"I'm awfully sorry," I said, "but I'm afraid Drusilla is right. There was not, as you say, the slightest need to inform old Mrs. Wynne off her own bat; but I don't see how she can let the present misunderstanding continue and retain that admiration of herself which is needful for us all to get through life decently."

I did not mean this to be cruel, but Lionel, who cannot forgive his sister for entertaining views so uncomfortable to himself at his club (and who is, moreover, a Turk at heart, like most Englishmen) added the poison.

"No," he said, "martyrs must advertise or they won't keep going. It is by letting every one know about their courage that they get it and keep it."

Poor Drusilla! this is the hardest cut of all, for there was just enough truth to sting — her revolt being largely imitative. She flung out of the room in a rage.

Naomi, who had taken no part in the discussion except to try to stop Lionel, followed her.

Alderley, when told about it, took, I think, a wise course. "Certainly she must unburden, if she wishes to," he said; "but she must go to Ludlow and tell the story in person. I won't have it done by letter."

And so Drusilla, very unwillingly, when the time came (our moral duty being often a confoundedly uncomfortable thing, which it is far simpler to neglect) was packed off to Ludlow with her poor little history of revolt, which (as her father had foreseen) was becoming a good deal of a bore.

The old lady, like her son, took it very well, Drusilla's honesty in the matter pleasing her far more than the unwomanliness of the conduct displeased her. Moreover, very old people rather like a little dare-devil in the young. But Drusilla had her punishment too.

"Well, well," Grandmamma said, "we won't say any more about it. What we must do for you now, my dear, is to find you a nice husband;" the result being a series of garden-parties and picnics at which curates and youthful squires were shamelessly paraded before our little firebrand, almost as if she had been a marriageable

South Sea islander, as indeed she practically was. When it comes to marriage we are all savages.

Drusilla, however, to use a phrase of Lionel's, was not taking any. She frightened the squires with her politics, and the curates with her theology, or the want of it.

"My dear Grandmamma," she said, "I don't want to marry."

"Nonsense, child," said the old lady; "of course you want to marry. All women do. What you mean is, you don't want to marry any one that you don't want to marry."

Drusilla did not acquiesce, but the chorus of Alf Pinto's latest song, as repeated far too often by Dollie Heathcote and Lionel, ran through her head —

> "Mr. Right! Mr. Right!
> He may not have knocked just yet;
> But cheer up, girls, he is putting on his boots,
> And he'll soon be here, you bet."

Mr. Right! Mr. Right! Was there a Mr. Right for every one? she wondered; for obviously the music-hall philosophy was a little too general. Statistics alone proved that.

As it turned out — but we shall see.

CHAPTER XIX

SOME MODERN CHILDREN ARE PROVIDED WITH SOME VERY CONGENIAL MATERIAL FOR LAUGHTER

ON a fine Sunday afternoon Naomi and I walked through three parks and Kensington Gardens to have tea with the Estabrooks. On Sunday they have a sit-down tea round the schoolroom table: a meal notable for cake and noise.

I put into my pocket a recent discovery at Bemerton's — a little manual for children belonging to the early eighteenth century, entitled *The Polite Academy, or School of Behaviour for Young Gentlemen and Ladies, intended as a foundation for good manners and polite address in Masters and Misses.*

"Do you want to hear me read something?" I asked after tea, and in response to a by no means frenzied appeal (for reading aloud is not the joy it was in my childhood) I began, after first explaining the purpose of the book.

I wish the original authors could have been

present, not for their happiness, I fear, but for their amazement at the change that has come over children and parents; for I have no doubt they wrote it quite earnestly and believed in its rightness, and to hear Kenneth's comments alone would have startled them more than it would startle that modern boy if the family Aberdeen terrier stood up and publicly said grace in a loud voice.

The perfect child, as formed by this book, would be unbearable, and probably never existed; but we must suppose that such works had their place, and not so long ago either, although it is difficult to project the imagination to that period, certain lines of thought having so completely gone out. For example, what point is there now in such a counsel as this: —

"Be not proud because you are above the vulgar, for there are others above you."

It is probable that not even the poor put the case so baldly any more, while as for what are called the middle-classes (if such exist, but one can never find any one to admit belonging to them), they certainly do not agree that they owe homage to any one, whatever they may do in the presence of the titled.

The fact probably is that there is no longer any accessible aristocracy. The old nobility is in hiding, while the new increases so swiftly and apparently so capriciously that the ordinary citizen no longer accepts it with the uncritical reverence as of old, but looks the gift horse, so to speak, in

the mouth. A lord is no longer, as he used to be, a lord: he is a law-lord, or a life-peer, or an ennobled brewer; something devilish like ourselves — we know his woof and texture.

Again, with money now able to do so much more than blood, aristocrats lose in that way too, to say nothing of their loss through blood doing as much to get money as it has sometimes had to do.

England is still largely feudal, but it no longer includes among its instructions to the young a section entitled, "Of Behaviour to Superiors."

"Take off your hat when any great person passes by, though you do not know him; it is a respect due to his rank."

That is meaningless to-day, and very happily so, I think; but I would rather see it restored to the curriculum than such a disgusting counsel as the following: —

"Be always pliable and obliging; for obstinacy is a fault of vulgar children."

The next section treats of "Behaviour to Equals" — who again are no longer mentioned among English people and cannot easily be found. It is an odd position to recognise neither superiors nor equals; but we can, most of us, fill it with distinction.

"Love all your equals and they will all love you."

"Always speak to them with respect, that they may treat you with respect again."

"If any of them are cross, be you civil never-

theless: his churlishness will disgrace him, while your good nature will gain you love and esteem."

The section, "Of Behaviour at School," made Kenneth and Christopher, the two Westminsters, very merry: —

"Behave to your teachers with humility and to your schoolfellows with respect."

"Make your bow or courtesy when you enter, and walk straight to your seat."

"Never quarrel at school, for it shows idleness and bad temper."

"When the master speaks to you, rise up to hear him, and look him in the face as he speaks, with modesty and attention. Begin not to answer him before he has done speaking, then bow to him with respect and answer him with humility."

"If you have occasion to complain of a schoolfellow, first speak to him softly and desire him to desist. If he will not, then rise up and wait an opportunity; and when the master's or usher's eye is upon you bow and say softly, and in a few words, what your complaint is."

This was too much.

"Did they really ever behave like that?" Kenneth asked.

"I suppose so," I said. "This is a book that seems to have been popular, for it has gone into many editions."

Kenneth stated himself to be jiggered.

I went on: —

"If you see your play-fellows do anything wrong, tell them of it."

"Return a jest with another, but always with good manners."

"Never call anyone by a reproachful name."

It is odd to think that anybody at any period could seriously have set down such mandates; but there they are in black and white — a kind of Sermon on the Mount by a dancing-master. It is when one reads counsels of something more than perfection — counsels of pedantic priggishness, shall we say — to natural, healthy children, that one realises how necessary compromise is to daily life and how far removed perfection is from the natural human being.

This little book may of course have been, even in its own day, excessively proper and inhuman: but I have seen others hardly less so. We have to remember that children, as creatures of delight, are of comparatively recent discovery. They were for many years merely the young of man, to be broken in like dogs. Not even the men of imagination knew any better. No child was, as far as I have read, thought a fit subject for introduction into a novel until Henry Brooke's *Fool of Quality*, and even there, although there are the high spirits of the two schoolboys, there are no infant-like tendernesses and natural gaiety. A few poets had praised the young very gaily — Prior and Ambrose Phillips, for example — but rather as courtiers than human beings: it was left for Blake first to see that the child was not merely

the young of man but a separate creature, filled with fugitive and exquisite charm.

To-day, of course, we are overdoing the discovery. The child is set in the midst, and we sit around worshipping and applauding and vying with each other in detecting and celebrating darlingnesses.

I went on to the section on "Behaviour to Parents and the Family":—

"As soon as you come into the room to your parents and relatives, bow, and stand near the door till you are told when to sit."

"Never sit down till you are desired, and then not till you have bowed, and answered what was asked of you."

"When in the room with your parents and relatives, never slip out privately, for that is mean and unhandsome."

"If you have sisters or brothers it is your duty to love them: they will love you for it and it will be pleasing to your parents and pleasure to yourselves."

"Be ready to give them anything they like, and they will give you what you desire."

"Will they?" said Norah, with bitter sarcasm; for Norah, as I have said, is the nursery drudge.

"If you think they are cross to you, be silent and gentle: and if that does not make them kind, complain to your father, mother, and relatives."

"Never revenge yourself, for that is wicked; your relatives will always take your part, when you behave with quietness."

If the child has been allowed to become human and individual, it is no less true that the parents and relatives have lost their godhead too. At the time of this book, parents could make no mistake, and every child had to be like every other child. No wonder that anthropomorphism crept in: it began with the first child; it began with Cain. Ever since then, God has been merely a larger man and a father.

But as fathers, under the new régime, become more companionable (as I see them becoming every day), this old ideal must weaken, for God will smile again — or rather will begin to smile.

The contrast between the unimaginative joylessness of these counsels of perfection and the laughter with which they were received brought home to one with curious vividness the difference, not only between the children of a hundred and fifty years ago and to-day, but between the parents too. Where the old parent admonished, the modern parent jokes. A kind of light banter has become the language of fathers and children in place of the ancient minatory formality.

Next came "Behaviour at Meals": —

"Nothing shows the difference between a young gentleman and a vulgar boy so much as their behaviour in eating."

"Sit patiently till the company are helped, and you will not be forgotten."

"Do not ask till you see the company are all helped: then if it happens you have been forgot, you will be served."

"Whatever is given you, be satisfied it is good, and desire no other."

"In eating fruit, do not swallow the stones, but lay them and the stalks on one side of your plate, laying one of the leaves that came with the fruit over them."

"Mightn't they see who they were going to marry?" Winifred asked.

"Never regard what another has on his plate: it looks as if you wanted it."

"When you drink, bow to some one of the company and say Sir or Madam."

This set them all shouting.

"Chew your meat well before you swallow it; but do this decently, without making faces."

"One for you, Sam," said Winifred.

The next section took us into the street: —

"When the school hours are over go out, as you came in, quietly, softly, and decently."

"When you come near a mob, walk to the other side of the street, and never concern yourself what's the matter."

"Oh, I like that!" said Kenneth. "What about a horse down?"

"I saw a chap being run in the other day," said Christopher.

"Never whistle or sing as you walk alone; for these are marks of clownishness and folly."

My own childhood is not so very remote, but it is far enough away for vast changes to have occurred in the relations of parents and children. We were all happy and familiar enough, but

there was none of the freedom of speech between young and old that is now encouraged. Dignity and age are equally out of fashion. We are all young to-day and almost more terrified of being out of things than of being accused of a want of humour. The last thing to go is juvenility.

Afterwards, I told the children a little about the Chinese pride in their parents and the high honour in which good sons are held in China. Not the least entertaining part of my Chinese book deals with filial piety, of which that people have Twenty-four Examples for the edification of youth. I told them about Lao Lai Tzŭ, of the sixth century B.C., who "at seventy was still accustomed" — "still" is good — "to divert his aged parents by dressing himself up and cutting capers before them."

Christopher at once said that they did that very often, but he had to admit that the prime object was to divert themselves.

Huang Hsiang, another of the Twenty-four Examples, who died A.D. 122, greatly delighted their sense of the ridiculous, for he "used to fan his parents' pillow in summer to make it cool, and get into their bed in winter to take the chill off."

Other examples I kept to myself, such as Tsing Tsan of the fifth century B.C., who maintained that one should remain single, since "with the possession of wife and children, the earnestness of a pious son would be likely to wane." None the less he married, but regained consistency by divorcing his wife "for serving up to his mother-

in-law some badly-stewed pears." This would have been beyond them; but I sent Kenneth into roars of laughter by the story of the youthful Emperor who amused himself by shooting blunted arrows at the stomach of the sleeping Regent — an indiscretion which led to a speedy succession.

There was a beautiful evening light when Naomi and I walked back: the light that always makes me sad, and I was sad too to think of the contrast between that noisy, happy home, so very full of life and high spirits, and my own solitary silent rooms; yes, and Naomi's too. There is something wrong in a civilisation which makes it so easily possible for so sweetly maternal a woman never to have children of her own.

I slipped my arm through hers and we walked without speaking.

CHAPTER XX

AN UNEXPECTED CHEQUE LEADS TO PLANS OF TRAVEL, AND NAOMI AND I ACCEPT A RESPONSIBILITY

"I DON'T suppose you've heard the news," I said, as we settled down to our soup.

"Do you mean about the Traffic Bill?" said Alderley.

"Or Notts and Yorkshire?" said Lionel.

"Or the Queen of Spain?" said my sister.

"Or John's portrait of Mrs. Grundy?" said Drusilla.

"Or Mr. Bemerton's latest find?" said Naomi.

"No," I said, "none of these. You couldn't really have guessed if you had gone on all night. The news is, that I am going to take you on the Continent for a month — as many of you as want to go."

Naomi spoke first. "But, Kent," she said, "how ——?"

"Hush!" I said. Then I took my pocket-book out of my pocket, opened it, extracted a slip of paper, unfolded it, and laid it on the

table before her. "There," I said, "is a cheque for £483 10s. 3d. It came to me this morning all unexpectedly, being the payment of a debt which I had long since given up hope of ever receiving. In other words, it is sheer profit, like all repaid loans.

"If we can all go to the Continent for a month on that amount," I continued, "let us do so. If not, let us go for three weeks or a fortnight. But I intend to take some of you, if not all.

"The question is," I went on, "where shall we go? We must debate the point with great care, and the majority will decide. I, I may say at once, have no preference. All I want to do is go to the Continent for a month and pay everything, provided of course that some one else will carry the purse. That I could never do."

"Dollie would love it," said Drusilla. "Besides, he can talk French like a ——"

"Like a french polisher," said Lionel, who has a turn for mechanical wit.

"Ah!" I said, "you lean towards France."

"Does he know Italian?" asked my step-sister.

"We seem to be crossing the Alps," I said.

"But, my dear Kent," Naomi remarked very earnestly, "you don't really mean to spend all that money on a holiday?"

"Why not," I asked, "if it comes from a clear sky? Let us consider it manna and quails, and consume it."

"I certainly should not dream of going," Naomi replied, "unless you promised at least to halve the amount and use the other half for some other purpose — helping some of my poor people, for example."

I threw the cheque to Naomi. "There," I said, "put it in the bank, and when we are ready to go, give us exactly half of it, and we will stay away until it is spent or we are all tired of seeing each other at *table d'hôte*. The other half you must do with exactly as you will."

"You dear thing!" Naomi cried.

All through dinner we discussed the merits of Continental resorts.

We began with France. Lionel suggested Trouville; but his sisters would have none of it.

"Then I can't go," he said. "I couldn't possibly be away for more than a few days until the season closes. We've got several matches yet."

Drusilla also remarked that she did not want to be away for so long as a month, but would not explain why.

Alderley wanted Brixen. He had heard so much of it from a Judge. No one else had heard of it at all, and he became very plaintive about money foolishly flung away on the education of the young. "Brixen," he said, "is in the Tyrol — a mountainous district of Austria."

After a short sharp passage with Drusilla he

admitted to having first met the name and fame of Brixen only a fortnight ago.

My sister voted for the Juras. She had seen a picture in the Academy, of a valley of wild flowers there, by MacWhirter, and she had always longed to visit them.

But against Switzerland rose the universal voice.

Norway was excluded on account of the sea voyage; Rome for its heat; Spain for ignorance of the language and (on Mrs. Wynne's account) prevalence of anarchists and bombs; the Black Forest for its want of civilised apparatus; the Tyrol for its steepnesses.

And then Naomi hit the nail on the head. "Venice," she said.

Of course.

Later in the evening Dollie Heathcote came in. He had looked round the dancing rooms to which he had been invited, had disapproved, and, disapproving, had with a bachelor's lofty privileges done what he called a guy.

"Besides," he said, not in excuse, for he admits to no errors, but in further explanation of a perfectly rational line of conduct, "there were crowds of men over — oceans."

"What do you know of Venice?" Naomi asked him.

"Venice," he said, "I know all about Venice. It is a suburb of New York, the streets are flooded, and there is nothing to eat except for mosquitoes, and they eat you."

"Very good," I said.

"Don't encourage the ass," said Lionel.

"Very good," I said, "but now be practical."

"Oh, as for that," said Dollie, "I know nothing of Venice except that the wise are said to stay at the Lido, where there is ripping bathing and no mosquitoes, and go over to Venice when they want to. It is quite close — much closer than the Isle of Wight is to Portsmouth and much jollier. I hate the Isle of Wight."

"Will you come with us?" I asked him. "As my guest?"

But he could not. He had arranged a series of visits for the Long Vacation, and he obviously wanted to pay them, or he would have accepted my invitation instantly. His duty always lies along the primrosiest path.

"Then it is you who will have to pay the bills and tip the waiters," I said to the K.C.

"Alderley loves that," said his wife.

And so it was settled: we were to go to Venice and go very soon.

I wrote to Miss Gold to tell her of the projected journey, and she replied instantly, asking me to come down at once and to be sure to bring Naomi with me.

She received us very warmly and got to business almost instantly.

"I have been making a new will," she said, "and I want you to be my executors — you, Kent, and Miss Wynne. It is, I know, unusual for one to ask one who is outwardly a total stranger, as

Miss Wynne may feel herself to be, to take such a post; but lying here and thinking, I seem to know you so very well, my dear, quite as well as I know many people whom I see, and I want you to humour an old sick woman who has so long been a friend of your friend Mr. Falconer.

"Besides," Miss Gold continued, "my will is not a very personal affair. There will be no grasping relations to deal with. I merely want to leave the money in trust to you two, to go on with certain schemes that I should not wish at once to be interrupted just because I was no longer lying here as usual. You will be business people — that is all."

"Tell us," I said, "what some of the schemes are."

"Well," she began, "for one thing I have a seaside home for London children — a mixture of seaside and country. It is in Sussex. I bought an old farmhouse and windmill, about a mile inland, and added to them until we can accommodate twenty children and three or four people to look after them. The farm goes on all the time, but the mill is idle. They play in that. There are very good sands there, I am told, and woods too. It seems to be an ideal spot. The children go down in twenties for ten days each from April till the middle of October — that means about four hundred children."

"But how do you choose the children?" I asked.

"Well, that is of course a difficulty. A Poor

Law Inspector in Clerkenwell helps me. They are all Clerkenwell children. One must be local or one is lost. He tells me the best cases.

"I have good helpers in Sussex," she continued. "The farmer's wife was my father's cook. She and two or three girls do the house work. There is also a lady in charge with some assistants. It all goes perfectly smoothly.

"That is one thing. Then there is my home of rest for horses," she added. "That might be transferred to Sussex, since this house will be sold. For another thing, I have got a paper."

"What kind of a paper?"

"Oh, a straightforward critical paper that tries to see the truth and tell it. It's rather expensive because we won't have any advertisements, but I don't mind that."

I began to see daylight. "I think I know it," I said. "Is it *The Balance?*"

"Yes. Do you think it is worth the money?"

"Oh yes," I said, "quite."

"And Mr. Dabney?"

"He's all right. At any rate, you'll never get a better man."

"He really does seem to have no axe to grind," Miss Gold remarked.

"No; except the angels'," I said. "His fault or foible," I added, "is a tendency to scold; but that is, of course, a defect of a quality, and after all it is to a large extent mitigated by the other contributions to the paper by gentler hands. Naomi's brother writes for it," I said.

"I should want," Miss Gold said, "to leave you absolute discretion as to keeping these things on or stopping them whenever you thought best. A time comes when the usefulness of almost all charities seems to be exhausted. The difficulty, of course, is to keep one's helpers keen. The transmission of enthusiasm is the hardest of all operations.

"And then," she continued, "there would be a sum for minor needs. Every one knows of small wants — 'deserving cases,' as the phrase is. Mr. Falconer has told me of two people I should like to do something for, although it is a question, as Mr. Trist says, if it is possible to help failures. I mean that poor old cataloguer at Bemerton's and the waterman at the corner. I believe that one ought to be able to think out something even for them; but I know how difficult it is, because I have tried. I have given just such a man as the waterman an overcoat, but he pawned it at once.

"And I have a great belief, rarely shaken," Miss Gold went on, "in the value of surprise gifts. I lie here longing to project five-pound notes, ten-pound notes, even twenty-pound notes (if there are such things) on to the breakfast-tables of poor clerks' wives who know what a holiday is but cannot take one, and brave typists who live on tea and bread and butter, and ladies in reduced circumstances who retain a little vanity but have no means to gratify it."

"Oh yes!" Naomi exclaimed, with shining eyes.

"But how can I learn about such needs, lying here as I do?" said my dear generous Agnes. "One can apply money well in that way only after making inquiries and moving much among people, observing and observing. But you two will have to do it," she added triumphantly, "because I am setting apart a sum the interest of which is solely to be used in that way."

I gasped, and Naomi looked at me and laughed.

"But tell me," Miss Gold said to Naomi, "something about your poor people."

And Naomi kept us laughing by her droll descriptions — laughing and sympathising too. Most of her stories unite the comic and the pathetic in perfectly equal proportions. There is an old lady in reduced circumstances in North London, for example, who lives in a large house (her own) with one small servant, and lets a few rooms. She was lately, when Naomi called on her, out of lodgers and all alone, her little servant being on a brief holiday. "But aren't you very lonely?" Naomi asked. "I am, rather," she admitted. "In fact, I don't know what I should do if it wasn't for this" — pointing to a pill-box at her side — "but I hear it moving now and then, and it seems to be company." The pill-box contained a jumping bean.

Just before we left, Naomi went into the paddock to take to the horses a bag of little carrots which she had brought on purpose.

"What a dear girl!" said Miss Gold.

"Yes," I said.

We were silent for a little while.

"She should marry," then said Miss Gold. "Some man much older than herself. What about Herbert Trist?"

Why did I feel so annoyed?

"Trist," I said, "Trist is not likely to marry any one."

"We must bring them together," Miss Gold replied.

"I don't think that is at all necessary," I said. "I hate match-making or any kind of interference with people."

Miss Gold smiled.

"Well," she said, as Naomi returned, "good-bye. I am so glad I can count on you. Now I can die more happily."

CHAPTER XXI

WE ARE WHIRLED AWAY BY THE 2.20 FROM CHARING CROSS AND MEET THE QUEEN OF THE ADRIATIC

WE went straight through, leaving Charing Cross by the 2.20 which has carried so many happy travellers away from London through the smiling valleys of Kent. Were I a poet, I would address an ode to that romantic liberating train.

It was after midnight on the following day when we drew up at last at Venice, tired and dusty and hungry and stained and not a little wondering why we had left London. But the next few minutes set that right, for all our weariness rolled away as we sat in the gondola under a soft starry sky, and watched the lights in the water, and heard the porters in fluent altercation, and at last got away and began to thread the narrow canal to Danieli's, where we were staying for that night.

The next morning we moved on, by Dollie's advice, to the large hotel by the landing-stage

at the Lido. I will not say that there are no mosquitoes — *zanzare* — there, but I am prepared to admit that the manager's theory is correct, and that we brought them with us from Venice.

The secret of the peculiar buoyancy of the Lido waters I do not know; but they are wonderful. "Like bathing in champagne," Alderley said; and that, though a vile sophisticated simile, comes near the mark. Other sands may be gayer; but for its gift of exuberant gladness the Lido comes first.

Drusilla's face, as we met, on our way to the sea down the wooden gangway, on the first afternoon, an Italian gentleman clad almost entirely in his own hair, was worth its weight in kodak films.

"Why can't he wear a bath towel like Kent and father?" she asked indignantly.

"Because he's an Italian," was Naomi's unanswerable reply, which, however Drusilla may have resented its insufficiency then, she was bound to agree with later; for the sea was full of such shameless happy monsters and their ladies, gambolling in the waves with both feet planted firmly and frankly on the bed of the ocean, and none of the Briton's shame at being found out no swimmer or any of his acrobatic efforts to convey to the shore an illusion of buoyancy.

Perhaps, when all is said, the profoundest difference between the Anglo-Saxon and the Latin is the Latin's indifference to public opinion. There is no true civilisation without

it — if by civilisation is meant the art of enjoying life.

As a general rule, after our bathing was done we lunched and then crossed to Venice, where we spent the rest of the day very lazily and very happily. Venice indeed imposes laziness. Even Americans doing Europe approach restfulness there. There is no hurrying a gondolier.

My stepsister, who had not sketched for years, once more produced her paint-box and block, and we used to establish her comfortably in a corner and leave her for an hour or so; Drusilla and Alderley paired off, and Naomi and I. Drusilla had of course to see all the pictures, and we let her and her father find them for us and take us only to those which they thought very good. Venice is not rich in good pictures; the best work of the Venetian school is elsewhere. Venice has the sprawling Tintorettos in abundance, some of which are magnificent and all miracles of virility; but she has few portraits from his hand to set, for example, against the old Admiral and the warrior in armour at Vienna, and nothing quite like the "Origin of the Milky Way," in our own National Gallery. Titian, again, after the "Assumption," may now be better studied away from his old home than in it, and there are more exquisite Guardis in London. In the Museo Civico, however, we found a great collection of Guardi's pen and pencil sketches, light as air. Giovanni Bellini, again, save for the little glowing allegories in the

Accademia, is not represented in Venice by anything so beautiful as his best pictures in Trafalgar Square; but for his brother Gentile (if you want him), as for Carpaccio, a journey to Venice is indispensable. Nor does one any longer see a Venetian maturing into a Robusti or Vecellio. The Venetians that throng the piazza of San Marco when the band is playing are not like that. Shrewd they seem to be, self-contained, masters of their narrow lives: but no more. Perhaps they account for the appalling deterioration of modern Venetian art.

As for Naomi and me, we preferred the real life of Venice to its show life, and we spent most of the time, after reaching the city, on foot. For one may walk about Venice all day, and by following the little narrow paths and bridges at random not only get lost but come upon fascinating little squares and churches, family groups at the doorsteps, and richly coloured fruit baskets. Being lost is, however, no inconvenience, for the Grand Canal is never far away, with some adjacent pier where one can board a steamer that will in time come to the Molo again.

We did not even see all the show places. The Doges' Palace spread its nets for Naomi and me in vain; but I cannot say how many times we found our way to the statue of Bartolommeo Colleoni on horseback in the Campo SS. Giovanni e Paolo, and more than twice did we cross to San Giorgio Maggiore to be taken round the choir stalls by a courtly priest and hear him

explain in fascinating broken English the carved scenes in the crowded life of St. Bernard; and more than twice did we glide on from San Giorgio to the Redentore, where a tall monk with a long grey beard unveiled one after the other the treasured paintings of the sacristy, and set us, with all the solicitude of an enthusiast, in the best light for each, enlarging earnestly, in easy, companionable Latin, on their beauties. A simple, kindly creature, who surely will be seated high in heaven after a life thus spent.

Meeting some English friends one day, we heard that the angel with a flaming sword no longer stood at the gate of the Edens' garden, but instead, the family being away, their compatriots were admitted on the presentation of a visiting card, and off we voyaged thither, across the canal della Giudecca into the narrow rio whence this paradise is gained: a tangled tropical place, lacking no charm but undulation. One walks on the flat between flowers and fruit along paths that seem never-ending, beneath a sun whose beams carry a fragrance of their own to add to that of the vegetation. The south-west boundary is the still and magical lagoon.

Here we loitered careless as man in his first state, while the lizards darted between our feet, flashing in and out of the beds and the stone-work by thousands. That is the ultimate impression conveyed by this Venetian garden — lizards. Large lizards and small, green and yellow, swift as arrows on the wing, and stopping as

suddenly as arrows in the target, bright-eyed, wary, daring, silent as shadows, clear and radiant as jewels. Lizards. Oranges and peaches, figs and nectarines may grow here like weeds; but it remains in the mind a garden of lizards.

On the days when we did not cross to Venice we would have tea either at the casino or in our hotel, watching the steamers empty and fill, and the arrival or departure of that prince in exile, Don Carlos, Duke of Madrid, whose habit it was every afternoon to visit the Lido in his motor launch with the ensign of Spain, accompanied, like a figure in the *Arabian Nights*, by a lady, a huge dog, and a black page. Tall and massive and bearded, I see him still, as he returned to his boat, pausing to open his purse and distribute alms, as a prince should, to all the beggars of the quay.

Usually in the evening we returned to Venice again to hear the music and eat an ice and recognise our countrymen. For Venice between eight and ten is concentrated into so small a space that it becomes a mere annexe of Piccadilly and Broadway.

When we had pored over Baedeker in Queen Anne's Gate, we had planned a score of excursions to neighbouring places — to Verona and Treviso, even to Bergamo; but Venice was too much for us. We had no such energy. Life was too sweet for sight-seeing, and we said, "If we make an expedition, let it be to-morrow and not to-day," and loafed and loafed.

One afternoon we had a very unexpected meeting. Naomi and I were in the last room in the Accademia, where Bellini's Madonna of the Two Trees hangs; and who should be already there studying the little gay series of allegories but Mr. Dabney of *The Balance?* He looked up with a face radiant with pleasure — not a trace for the moment of his usual critical discontent.

"At last!" he said.

"Then you have been expecting to find us?" I asked.

"I have been to all the hotels," he replied, "and no one had ever heard of you. I found I could snatch a fortnight, and I came right out at once."

From that time Mr. Dabney was constantly near us or with us, and was good company in the mass, but I found him no particular addition on such rambles as Naomi and I had been accustomed to take together. He had, however, not been in Venice before, and we, with our brief familiarity with it, being in the very agreeable position of comparatively oldest inhabitants, found a certain pleasure in showing him the sights.

In France he would have been, I think, a sad bore, for there he would have discovered so many points of superiority to the English: but not even so keen a censor of his own country and countrymen as Mr. Dabney could find aught in Venice, except such forgivable and inimitable advantages as crumbling and picturesque architecture

and clear skies, to hold up as a model for home adoption.

And so, although a few walks with Naomi were ruined, I did not think hardly of Mr. Dabney or suspect danger, until one evening, after he had returned to the city in the last steamer, Drusilla remarked that he was evidently hard hit.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"By Naomi," she answered; and straightway the soft languorous moon left the sky and the delicate stars were blotted out. . . .

Of course. . . .

Why had I been so blind?

Returning to the hotel, I said good-night to the others, and again walked out. I sat on the quay and looked over towards the mainland, and realised, as one can realise only on very beautiful nights, how empty life is if it holds not one's desire.

What was my desire?

Did I want Naomi?

I had never put the question to myself in so many words; I hardly put it now. But I knew, as I had known when Miss Gold made that remark about Trist and Naomi just before we came away, that I did not want any one else to want her.

Eternal dog in the eternal manger, that will not claim for itself, and equally dislikes others to claim!

I was not a philanderer: I had hated philandering almost more than any of the selfish vices;

I was not a coward, or at any rate I was sufficiently a fatalist to have no fear of the future. These things I knew. What, then, was it that I suddenly recognised was making me loathe myself and my kind?

Could I really be one of those hesitants in love who had so puzzled me, and against whom I had in my perplexity, my imperfect knowledge, directed so many a hard adjective?

Strange how gradually one has to come to the understanding not only of other men but of oneself! In a flash now I realised their tragedy and felt for them a great sorrow, none the less intense for its inclusion of myself.

They truly are food rather for our sympathy than contempt, who have not loved enough to demand, but have loved too much or have too much hated the thought of others loving, to be able to renounce. How that worm must gnaw!

There is no end to the subtle tortures which civilisation has devised and is devising, but surely not the least is this modern hesitancy, which increases and will increase as we become more complex and believe less in another world and therefore more in enjoying this: this terror lest the step we are taking should produce anything less than the maximum of happiness. In one life, so short, to make a false move, how can one bear to contemplate it? — and thus terrified, we make none at all.

Was I like that? I asked myself, and repudiated

the charge. No: I was not like that; nor must I be.

I grew calmer as I decided thus, and calmer still as I realised that such fears, such panics, were common to those on the brink of a passion.

As I was?

Was I? Is it possible to reach one's first passion at the age of fifty-five? I laughed aloud at the use of such a novelist's word. But one thing was certain, and that was that Naomi was the dearest companion I could ever know, I who had never much wanted a companion at all — Naomi's quiet presence and alert interest, Naomi's serene face, Naomi's atmosphere. I could not indeed think calmly of life without Naomi at all.

And she? Had she any such thoughts of me as a companion? I knew nothing, less than nothing. How should I know? I had never studied women. I had got on with them very well; had had a few friends among them in the Argentine: but always, I realised now, with the gloves on. Naomi was my first frank companion — since Agnes Gold those many years ago.

Agnes Gold. What was she thinking, as she lay there on her poor back, about Naomi and me? She had mentioned Trist as the ideal husband, but it was Naomi and me whom she had invited to control her affairs.

That thought gave me comfort, and I braced myself under it. I drew a long breath and turned my back on the soft stars and the lights of

Venice and the pitiless, lovely, still lagoon, and went to bed convinced of two things: one being that it was fortunate our visit to this accursed beauty-spot was nearly done, and the other that I would do all I could to keep out of the black pit of melancholia, for I saw swiftly down a vista of very dark possibilities.

CHAPTER XXII

MR. BEMERTON'S SECOND BED BOOK SOLACES ME WITH THE ODD AND HUMANE HUMOURS OF STUARTS AND TUDORS

JOHN AUBREY, whose *Brief Lives* Mr. Bemerton has sent me with a strong recommendation, and to whom I turned that night, is a man after my own heart. He had an eye for character, if you like, and his interest in the picturesque foible was at least as great as his interest in virtue. To read his concise little summaries of Elizabethan and Stuart personalities is to be made free of a most conversible company very near real life.

He knows his value as a kind of footpage to the Muse of Biography. He admits it in the following passage: — "About 1676 or 5, as I was walking through Newgate-street, I sawe Dame Venetia's bust standing at a stall at the Golden Crosse, a brazier's shop. I perfectly remembered it, but the fire had gott-off the guilding: but taking notice of it to one that was

with me, I could never see it afterwards exposed to the street. They melted it downe. *How these curiosities would be quite forgott, did not such idle fellowes as I am putt them downe!*" The italics are mine.

Then again in the following passage in the notes on John Hoskyns: — "He lies buried under an altar monument on the north side of the choirs of Dowre Abbey in Herefordshire. (In this abbey church of Dowre are two *frustums* or remaynders of mayled and crosse-legged monuments, one sayd to be of a Lord Chandois, th'other the lord of Ewyas-lacy. A little before I sawe them a mower had taken one of the armes to whett his syth.)" That is the seeing eye.

All sorts and conditions of men, provided they had some merit or station, appear in his pages, just as in my Chinese book; but Aubrey kept a special corner for mathematicians and merry ladies. His chief mathematician and perhaps greatest hero was Hobbes of *The Leviathan;* but there are many others. Here, for example, is the description of one: — "He is of little stature, perfect; black haire, of a delicate moyst curle; darke eie, but of great vivacity of spirit. He is of a soft temper, of great temperance (*amat Venerem aliquantum*), of a prodigious invention, and will be acquainted (familiarly) with nobody." Who was that? A thousand guesses. I will tell you. Do you remember at the beginning of atlases a map of the world with the hemispheres

flattened out, entitled Mercator's projection? Well, that is a description of Mercator — Mr. Nicholas Mercator. Philip Melancthon, says Aubrey, was Mercator's great-grandmother's brother.

For the merrier ladies, Aubrey's own pages must be consulted, since one may no longer write all one would; but here is his account of the wife of the great Falkland: — "At length, when she [Letice Cary] could not prevaile on him [her husband], she would say that, 'I warrant you, for all this, I will obtaine it of my lord; *it will cost me but the expence of a few teares.*'"

Aubrey's pen now and then could etch almost like Rembrandt. Here is Sir John Birkenhead: — "He was exceedingly confident, witty, and very grateful to his benefactors, would lye damnably. He was of middling stature, great goggli eies, not of a sweet aspect"; and Sir John Denham's eye is made again to shine too, though it has been shut these many years: — "His eie was a kind of light goose grey, not big; but it had a strange piercingness, not as to shining and glory, but (like a Thomas) when he conversed with you he look't into your very thoughts." It was Sir John Denham (author of *Cooper's Hill*) who wrote to King Charles II. begging for George Wither's life to be spared, because "whilest G. W. lived he (Denham) should not be the worst poet in England."

Aubrey indeed had a special gift for the salient trait. Thus, of my dear Thomas Fuller, of the *Worthies*, he writes: — "He was of a middle

stature; strong sett; curled haire; a very working head, in so much that, walking and meditating before dinner, he would eate-up a penny loafe, not knowing that he did it." That tells more than chapters might.

Whether or not Aubrey told the truth, we shall, I suppose, never know, but he reads like fact. One sees, at any rate, that he wanted the truth; other things did not interest him. His account of Milton may be taken as an example. One did not quite expect it, and yet one believes it: — "His harmonicall and ingeniose soul did lodge in a beautifull and well-proportioned body. . . . He had abroun hayre. His complexion exceeding faire — he was so faire that they called him *the lady of Christ's College*. Ovall face. His eie a darke gray. He had a delicate tuneable voice, and had good skill. His father instructed him. He had an organ in his howse; he played on that most. Of a very cheerfull humour. He would be chearfull even in his gowte-fitts, and sing." One does not think of the blind Milton as cheerfully singing; and yet I believe it if Aubrey says so.

Milton's friend, Andrew Marvell, comes very engagingly out of these pages: — "He was of a middling stature, pretty strong sett, roundish faced, cherry cheek't, hazell eie, browne haire. He was in his conversation very modest, and of very few words; and though he loved wine he would never drinke hard in company, and was wont to say that *he would not play the good fellow*

in any man's company in whose hands he would not trust his life. He kept bottles of wine at his lodgeing, and many times he would drinke liberally by himselfe to refresh his spirits, and exalt his muse."

Aubrey on Shakespeare has one very interesting detail: — "Mr. William Shakespear was born at Stratford-upon-Avon, in the county of Warwick. His father was a butcher, and I have been told here before by some of the neighbours, that when he was a boy he exercised his father's trade, but when he kill'd a calfe he would do it in a high style, and make a speech. There was at that time another butcher's son in this towne that was held not at all inferior to him for a naturall witt, his acquaintance and coetanean, but dyed young." Now, the gods stand up for butchers; but what a thing it would have been had this other lad grown up too, and written plays too! Two Swans of Avon. For the rest, Shakespeare "was a handsome, well-shap't man; very good company, and of a very readie and pleasant smooth witt."

Between Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher, says Aubrey, "there was a wonderfull consimility of phansey which caused that deareness of friendship between them."

I find that the famous story of Sir Walter Raleigh and his son is Aubrey's. The boy, who was a bit of a firebrand and by no means in the paternal favour, was taken by his father, much against his will, to dine with a great distinguished

company. "He sate next to his father, and was very demure at least halfe dinner-time. Then sayd he, 'I, this morning, not having the feare of God before my eies but by the instigation of the devill, went . . .' Sir Walter being strangely surprized and putt out of his countenance at so great a table, gives his son a damned blow over the face. His son, as rude as he was, would not strike his father, but streches over the face of the gentleman that sate next to him and sayd, 'Box about: 'twill come to my father anon.'"

Of Nicholas Hill there is this good story, which I must remember to tell Miss Gold: — "In his travells with his lord (I forget whether Italy or Germany, but I think the former), a poor man begged him to give him *a penny*. 'A penny!' said Mr. Hill, 'what dost say to ten pound?' 'Ah! ten pound!' (said the beggar) 'that would make a man happy.' N. Hill gave him immediately 10 *li*, and putt it downe upon account, — 'Item, to a beggar ten pounds, to make him happy.'"

One of Aubrey's friends — old Thomas Tyndale (whom he put into his comedy, *The Country Revel*, as Sir Eubule Nestor) — reminds me of Mr. Dabney. Tyndale survived long into the Stuart age from that of Elizabeth, and he was for ever looking fondly back. Aubrey quotes some of his lamentations: — "Our gentry forsooth in these dayes are so effeminated that they know not how to ride on horseback. — Tho when the gentry

mett, it was not at a poor blind sordid alehouse, to drinke up a barrell of drinke and lie drunke there two or three days together; fall together by the eares. They mett tho in the fields, well-appointed, with their hounds or their hawkes; kept up good hospitality; and kept a good retinue, that would venture that bloud and spirit that filled their vaines which their masters' tables nourisht; kept their tenants in due respect of them. We had no depopulacion in those dayes.

"You see in me the ruines of time. The day is almost at end with me, and truly I am glad of it: I desire not to live in this corrupt age. I foresawe and foretold the late changes, and now easily foresee what will follow after. Alas! O' God's will! It was not so in Queen Elizabeth's time: then youth had respect to old age." And so forth. I suppose there have always been such deplorers of the present, from the days of Cain.

I have always had a warm feeling for the author of "The Farewell to the Fairies," certain lines of which recur so exquisitely again and again, like a refrain in music, in Mr. Kipling's *Puck of Pook's Hill*: —

"Farewell, rewards and fairies,
Good housewives now may say,
For now foul sluts in dairies
Do fare as well as they;
And though they sweep their hearths no less
Than maids are wont to do,
Yet who of late for cleanliness
Finds sixpence in her shoe?"

Dan and Una knew it all by heart:—

"At morning and at evening both,
You merry were and glad,
So little care of sleep and sloth
These pretty ladies had.
When Tom came home from labour,
Or Ciss to milking rose,
Then merrily went their tabor,
And nimbly went their toes."

"Witness these rings and roundelays
Of theirs which still remain,
Were footed in Queen Mary's days,
On many a grassy plain,
But since of late Elizabeth,
And later James, came in,
They never dance on any hearth
As when the time hath bin."

Isn't it charming? Could it ever have been done better, before or since?

"By which we note the fairies
Were of the old profession,
Their songs were Ave Mary's,
Their dances a procession;
But now, alas, they all are dead,
Or gone beyond the seas,
Or farther for religion fled,
Or else they'd take their ease."

Of Bishop Corbet, of Oxford and Norwich, who wrote that somewhere shall we say about the year 1612 — at about the time that William Shakespeare, having finished his own dealings with the fairies, settled down as a gentleman of leisure at New Place, Stratford-on-Avon, — Aubrey has much to tell.

A bishop who will go to the trouble of lamenting

the loss of fairies at all is something of a *rara avis*, especially when he admits their Romish tendencies; but to be the only begetter of such a story as "Dymchurch Flit" (even at an interval of three hundred years), that is the true road to gratitude.

Witty bishops are always good company — just as a joke in a serious paper gives one more pleasure than a joke in a comic paper. In fact, so much is this the case that a bishop to gain a reputation for wit need not, as one too often blushingly discovers, really be witty at all: a very thin imitation of the real thing will suffice. It is the same with Judges: laughter holding both its sides (in parenthesis) will pursue their mildest *facetiæ*. Richard Norwich, however, was a true wit, although, as he lived at a time before biography was much practised, we have few enough of his good sayings.

Whatever happened we should have the Bishop's verses; but had it not been for John Aubrey we should know little of his spoken jests, some of which are very modern in spirit. Here is Aubrey: "After he was doctor of divinity, he sang ballads at the Crosse at Abingdon. On a market-day he and some of his comrades were at the taverne by the Crosse (which, by the way, was then the finest in England: I remember it when I was a freshman: it was admirable curious Gothicque architecture, and fine figures in the nitches, 'twas one of those built by king . . . for his queen). The ballad-singer complayned he had no custome — he could not put off his ballads. The jolly

Doctor puts off his gowne, and puts on the ballad-singer's leathern jacket, and being a handsome man, and a rare full voice, he presently vended a great many.

"His conversation was extreme pleasant. Dr. Stubbins was one of his cronies; he was jolly fat doctor, and a very good housekeeper. As Dr. Corbet and he were riding in Lob Lane in wet weather ('tis an extraordinary deepe dirty lane), the coache fell, and Corbet said that Dr. S. was up to the elbows in mud, and he was up to the elbows in Stubbins." Sydney Smith might have said that. I know of no better fat-man joke, industrious as the humorists have always been on that promising topic.

Aubrey continues: "A.D. 1628, he was made Bishop of Oxford; and I have heard that he had an admirable grave and venerable aspect. One time as he was confirming, the country people, pressing in to see the ceremonie; said he, 'Beare off there, or I'll confirm ye with my staffe!' Another time, being to lay his hand on the head of a man very bald, he turns to his chaplaine, and said, 'Some dust, Lushington,' to keepe his hand from slipping.

"There was a man with a great venerable beard; said the Bishop, 'You, behind the beard.'" That is quite in a modern comedian's manner: "You, behind the beard!"

Aubrey ends with this convivial memory: "His Chaplaine, Dr. Lushington, was a very learned and ingenious man, and they loved one

another. The Bishop would sometimes take the key of the wine cellar, and he and his chaplaine would go and lock themselves in and be merry; then first he layes down his episcopal hood, 'There layes the doctor'; then he puts off his gowne, 'There layes the bishop'; then 'twas 'Here's to thee, Corbet'; 'Here's to thee, Lushington!'" Bishops and then chaplains are not like that now; and perhaps it is as well. But those were more spacious days. And, after all, when a chaplain is named Lushington . . .!

I find one excellent and more serious saying of Corbet recorded by another acquaintance, for I have been looking into his history. On a public occasion — the visit of King James to Cambridge in 1614–5, the Bishop, who was present, was much beset by his companions to indulge his satirical vein, for the employment of which there was no lack of material. But he refrained, saying that "he had left his malice and judgment at home, and came there only to commend."

Next to the *Farewell*, the Bishop's prettiest verses are to his son Vincent, on his third birthday:—

"I wish thee, Vin, before all wealth,
Both bodily and ghostly health:
Nor too much wealth, nor wit, come to thee;
So much of either may undo thee.
I wish thee learning, not for show,
Enough for to instruct, and know;
Not such as gentlemen require,
To prate at table, or at fire.
I wish thee all thy mother's graces,
Thy father's fortunes, and his places.

I wish thee friends, and one at court,
Not to build on, but support;
To keep thee, not in doing many
Oppressions, but from suffering any.
I wish thee peace in all thy ways,
Nor lazy not contentious days;
And when thy soul and body part,
As innocent as now thou art."

How many a wish in verses to a child has been falsified in this sad world! Poor little Vincent Corbet grew into a wastrel, and after his father's death was to be seen begging in the streets of London. The Bishop was perhaps a wiser man than parent. Many wits are. He died in 1635; his last words were, "Good night, Lushington."

CHAPTER XXIII

MISS AZURE VERITY AND MR. DABNEY OF *THE BALANCE* CONTINUE TO KEEP MY MIND TO A SINGLE SUBJECT

I RATHER liked my own rooms once, but Miss Verity's have made me discontented. What is the secret of femininity? Can it be reduced to a word? Not by me. But a literary exquisite — a Flaubert or a Maupassant — in search of it might do worse than await inspiration at Azure's flat.

She reads everything that she ought, and by some subtle influence compels publishers to bind attractively everything that she ought to read. If I buy a new book it is as likely as not dingy in hue; but if Azure buys one it is like herself, winning and gay. Her shelves smile. She likes little books, and has a dozen little table-stands for them.

Her flowers are perfection — just a few in each glass. On the larger table is a dwarf Japanese tree spreading its gnarled and venerable branches for a Liliputian smithy to shelter beneath; it is

a hundred and fifty years old. On the walls are a few coloured wood blocks, a water colour or so, a Japanese print here and there, and the mask of the dead girl from the Morgue.

Azure was not there when I entered. The cleverest women are not. Having given me time to look round and catch the note, she came in, or at least suddenly she was in the room. Had I been blind and deaf I should have known it. She has a presence: she vibrates.

Sancho Panza the wise, who, it is on record, liked a man to be a man and a woman a woman, would have liked Azure Verity; but he would have marvelled too at the fine flower that civilisation has produced. For art has gone to her making as much as nature. Indeed, it is not the natural woman that she makes one think of, but this other and more formidable creation, the woman evolved from luxurious modern conditions: the woman who sets Greenlanders hunting rare arctic creatures that she may be warm, and brown peasants toiling in the vineyards about Rheims that she may drink bubbling wine and be gay, and chemists distilling perfumes from flowers that she may exhale fragrance, and Persian divers plunging for pearls that she may emphasise the beauty of her neck.

But Azure, though her salary and her wealthy spoiling friends can bring all those luxuries to her slender white hand, is in no way the victim of them. She accepts them naturally, but she keeps herself simple too — impulsive and ardent in her

sympathies, very generous, and so ready for an adventure that she would be prepared to go through with it entirely on bread and cheese.

"Now," she said, after tea had been taken away and the room had gained the composure necessary for more intimate talk, "now tell me about your Naomi."

"What am I to say?" I replied.

"She is very attractive," said Azure.

"Do you think so?" I said diffidently. (I certainly think so, but I was not particularly anxious to hear others say so too.)

"Why isn't she married?" was Azure's next question.

"She has not been asked, I suppose," I said.

"Do you mean to tell me that no one has proposed to her? It's not conceivable."

"Not to my knowledge," I said.

"How absurd!" she answered reflectively. "There is a girl born to be a wife, and no one has the sense. . . . While I . . ." she broke off.

"Naturally," I said.

"Well," she exclaimed, "what are we to do?"

"Do?"

"Yes, how are we to get her married?"

"But why?" I said as bravely as I could.

"Why? Because she is far too sweet and too sensible to die an old maid."

"She is very happy," I said.

"Relatively happy, perhaps."

"Are you so convinced that every one should marry?"

"Oh no, not every one; but certainly Miss Wynne."

"But you don't know her!" I said.

"Know her! Of course I do. I saw her at the theatre."

"Only for a moment."

"Well, that's the way to see people. I never need to see any one twice to know them. My first impressions are always right. Sometimes I go back on my first impressions, but it is always a mistake to do so."

"And looking at her like that, you saw that she wanted to marry?"

"Certainly. It is fearfully plain to any one but a selfish uncle. What a pity," she added after a pause, "that you are her uncle."

My heart beat horribly. "But I'm not," I said.

"Not her uncle?" said Azure. "I thought you were. What are you then?"

I told her that Mrs. Wynne was my step-sister.

She said nothing for quite a long while, and I tried to think of something entirely different to say, but could not.

All I could say was, "To change the subject a little, how is it that you, with such belief in marriage . . ."

"Oh, I'm not a marrying woman," she said. "I have no courage to face a loss of liberty. I must be my own mistress."

"As you would always be," I said.

"I daren't risk it," she replied.

"And yet, . . ." I said.

"Oh yes, I know what you mean. I have been engaged, and I let myself be run after. It's quite true, but I can't help it. I get so fond of them, and they are so nice to me; but they will spoil it all. It's all rubbish to say that marriages are made in heaven; they're not. It is courtship that is made in heaven. The dreadful thing about marriage to me is that it means the end of the engagement. The engagement is so beautiful: people are so kind to such, so understanding and sympathetic and generous and patient. And then they marry and everything is over."

"And yet you want Naomi to marry."

"Oh, Naomi is different. Naomi is a born wife; I am a born *fiancée*. Naomi would not see half the things I did. Naomi would love her husband all the more because he was ill; I should hate him. Naomi would love to have babies; I should be terrified and ashamed."

"I am afraid you are a bad citizen," I said.

"Very," she replied; "but I have the honesty to admit it; and I spend a lot of time trying to get good citizenship into others." She smiled with adorable mischief.

"Well," I said, "here we have been talking for an hour, and what have we done? You invited me to come and tell you about Venice, and I have not mentioned the place; nor have you asked me to. All we have talked about is other persons' lives."

"Well," she retorted, "and what did you expect? Aren't we in London? That is the only subject here. No matter how a conversation between a man and woman begins, it is bound, sooner or later, to reach some one else's domestic complications. As for me, I love it. One may talk books and plays and pictures and travel now and then, but the only real interest is other people — their hearts or their want of heart, their follies and their pockets."

"Much better," I replied, "have some interest in your own heart."

"Not I," she answered firmly. "That would be too serious."

On the doorstep whom should I meet but Mr. Dollie Heathcote, a picture of cool tailoring, carrying a bouquet. For the first time in our acquaintance, his expression of perfect contentment and serenity was dimmed by a passing cloud.

"What ho!" he said.

"What ho!" I replied. "I thought you were at Cromer."

"You would not have me remain idle and frivolous on the East Coast," he said, "while the funeral of my aunt is in progress in the metropolis?"

"Certainly not," I answered.

He still looked the least bit abashed.

"It's all right," I said, perceiving his thought, "I shan't mention it. For some time now I have entirely given up the habit of remembering that I ever saw any one anywhere."

He laughed quite comfortably again.

"Pip, pip!" he said, and disappeared up the stairs.

So Dollie was among the suitors! A very good thing, too.

I walked home rather thoughtfully by way of the Green Park and St. James's Park. It was a golden afternoon, and there were many lovers, and their happiness made me happy and made me sad. What would have been the result, I wondered, if steady happiness had been set on the throne of this world instead of uncertainty and change and disappointment? How would life have developed had we been born happy and well, and lived happily, and loved happily, and then, when our days were fulfilled, had suddenly died happily?

Would it have harmed the race? Have misfortune and disease and frustration and insecurity been necessary to man's ingenuity and industry? Without sorrow should we have had no telegraph? without tears, no camera? Have all the benefits of civilisation been wrung from us in some effort to escape from the blows of fate? And even if so, might not happiness, without the advantages of progress, have still been better?

I stood on the bridge and watched the birds for a long while. They too had been in love, and would be again next spring, most of them, and it was just as real to them as to the youths and maidens on the seats and in the boats, and — to me?

To me.

I walked home in a brown study.

Azure Verity had sufficiently disturbed my mind, but I was destined to receive a worse shock before the day closed. I dined at Queen Anne's Gate, and we had a very amusing evening, trying over a number of folk-songs from Somerset, which the morris-dancers are making popular. I left at about eleven, and Alderley said he would walk with me as he had something to tell me.

Briefly it was that Mr. Dabney had asked if he might pay his addresses to Naomi. He would not, he said, say anything to her until he had the parents' permission; which is punctilious of him if not romantic. I think, however, I see his point of view, which is that, being practically a Republican at heart, and certainly rather anti-English, he might be too repugnant a son-in-law for a public man like Mr. Wynne to consider, and it was therefore only honest to begin by giving the father the chance of refusal.

Alderley, however, has no such objection to him; the objection comes from Naomi herself, who informed her father that she could never love Mr. Dabney and so settled the matter at once. And since one cannot think of him as precisely the build of a blighted and suicidal lover, the matter ends.

But why should my heart again stand still as Alderley told me about it?

CHAPTER XXIV

WITH MR. BEMERTON'S ASSISTANCE I TAKE REFUGE AMID A GALLANT COMPANY OF SEA DOGS

MR. BEMERTON again stood my very good friend, for he had sent up during the day a book which he thought would do something for my thirst for character; and indeed it did. It was a recent volume of the Navy Records Society — a full-blooded work entitled by its editor *Recollections by James Anthony Gardner*, but by this same Gardner, an officer in Nelson's day, *Naval Recollections in Shreds and Patches, with Strange Reflections above and under Hatches.*

Being old enough to remember very vividly the shock that followed after that other James Anthony's rending of the Cheyne Row veil, I was not unwilling to get a new connotation for those two Christian names. And certainly James Anthony Gardner is a find.

He was born in 1770, in what he thought the best of all lands — Ireland; and he came home from the sea in 1802, but he did not take his pen

in hand until 1836, during which time his memory had purged itself of inessentials. He wrote them not for the cold eye of a publisher's reader but (like a gentleman) for his own family's entertainment. The result is a narrative of extraordinary directness, full of careless human qualities, naked and unashamed, and some pretty exercises in objurgation, prefaced by the following ingenious verses: —

> "I know nothing of grammar;
> At school they never could hammer
> Or beat it into my head.
> The bare word made me stammer,
> And turn pale as if I were dead.
> But here I may as well be telling,
> I'm often damned out in my spelling.
> And this is all the apology
> I offer for my chronology
> And biographical sketches
> Of mighty men and lubberly wretches,
> From seventeen hundred and seventy-seven,
> Their rank, their titles, and their names all given."

The last line contains nothing more nor less than the truth, for Gardner, although so many years had passed, and he had served in as many as twelve vessels, as midshipman, master's mate, and lieutenant, remembered every man, and when the time came for appraisement was all ready with his summary. It is these summaries, so vivid and searching and kindly and understanding, to which it interests me to draw attention: for such things are new to me, and may be new to others; by their vigour and candour they take

their place with more ambitious anthropological efforts.

For swift and vivid summary it would be hard to beat some of the following entries in Gardner's book of memory: —

Charles Buchan, purser. Dead. A most worthy gentleman.

Jack Swanson, gunner. Dead. A very good man but had a very bad wife.

Thomas Floyd, third lieutenant. Dead. A dandy.

W. Colt, midshipman. Dead. A very good fellow. We used to call him "Old Owl."

George Rule Bluet, midshipman. Dead. A good-natured fellow, with good abilities, but drank hard. I recollect being of a party at Gosport when Bluet wanted to make love to a young lady, but did not know how to begin. At last he took out of his pocket a plan of the *Edgar's* hold, which he begged her to accept, and hoped she would keep it for his sake.

Sol Saradine. Dead. A droll, wicked fellow.

How Stevenson and Henley would have rejoiced in this name! Sol Saradine. It breathes piracy and lawlessness.

Ben Forester, captain of marines. Dead. As brave and generous a soul as ever lived, but thoughtless and died unfortunate.

— Cook, Carpenter. Dead. A good man; no dandy.

Edward Forster, midshipman. Dead. Herculean Irishman; a terror to the dockyard maties.

Thomas Watson, midshipman. Dead. A glorious noisy fellow.

Is not that an epitaph indeed, one to be proud of? I wish I was a glorious noisy fellow.

Joseph Loring, third lieutenant. Dead. A good sailor, very passionate, and swore like the devil.

The Parson (I forget his name). Dead. Had no dislike to grog.

Edward Dowdall, gunner. Dead. Lethargic; always dozing in the forecastle; a sleepy, good man.

John Sandford, midshipman. Dead. A member of the Hell-Fire Club; a dandy, and a droll fellow.

Thomas James Skerret, midshipman. This fellow wanted to be a tyrant, but was too great a fool.

Robert Manning, midshipman. Dead. Bob was a good fellow.

Henry Batt, midshipman. Dead. An old schoolfellow of mine. Harry was passionately fond of grog, which made him an ungrateful return by taking him out of this world before it was agreeable. Nicknamed "Ram," "Cat," "Batt," and "Rammon the Butcher."

Alexander Proctor, surgeon's assistant. Proud as the devil.

Hugh Land, clerk. A clever little pedant.

William Nowel, second lieutenant. Dead. Gloomy and fiery, but a good officer and gentleman.

John Irwin, fourth lieutenant. Dead. A very good fellow, always smiling.

John Roskruge, master. Dead. A very good man, one that was better acquainted with rope-yarns and bilge-water than with Homer or Virgil. He said a man's ideas should go no further than the jib-boom end.

John Tursides, midshipman. A droll old guardo.

Henry Foularton, midshipman. Dead. Very religious, and remarkably neat in his dress: but at last drank very hard, and died regretting that a keg of gin (alongside of him) should see him out, which was really the case.

Billy Culmer, mate. Dead. Everyone has heard of Billy.

Thomas H. Tidy, midshipman. Dead. Poor Tom.

John Nazer, mate. A very good and very ugly fellow.

Peter M'Kinnon, gunner. A good sailor, but used to damn his poor eyes so.

I could go on indefinitely thus, calling forth from their graves these hard-bitten sea dogs; but that is enough. It is literature in its way, is it not?

Are there the same or kindred characters in the Navy to-day, one wonders. Let us hope so.

But as time goes on and sophistication spreads, the outstanding eccentricities are apt to decrease; there is a general planing down of the harder knots. Gardner's book, however, is in the main narrative. It is only at the end of the chapters that he prints these critical lists. Many of his old messmates come in for more detailed description — Mr. Stack, for example. Mr. Stack was "cursed surly and disagreeable, but I believe meant well. . . . When in good temper (which was seldom) he would say 'my son' when he addressed any of us; but generally 'I'll split your ear.'"

Mr. Stack had no richness; he was simply a testy officer; not like Mr. Quinton, with whom grog agreed so happily (among other things, "making his flesh firm") that he took twenty-six tumblers of good Hollands and water a day. "I must in justice declare, however," adds Gardner, "that Mr. Quinton was no drunkard; I never saw him disguised with liquor." On the same ship, the *Orestes*, was Mr. Stevens. When Sir Roger Curtis came to inspect the vessel Mr. Stevens was the first to go aloft, and was heartily commended by Sir Roger for his activity. "You're a fine fellow, Mr. Stevens," he called up, "a most active officer, Mr. Stevens; you are a wonder, Mr. Stevens." But Sir Roger spoke too soon, for Mr. Stevens was in reality a slacker, and was the last left on the yard. Sir Roger soon put things right. "I recall all my compliments, Mr. Stevens," he bawled; "you're a damned

lubber, Mr. Stevens; a blockhead, Mr. Stevens; come down, Mr. Stevens."

Lieutenant Morgan deserves to be better known, for he accepted one of man's little difficulties with fortitude and humour. One day a midshipman named Millar joined the ship, and Morgan, giving him a quick glance, sprang towards him and asked him to dine that evening. Millar was bewildered, for he had never seen Morgan before, but he accepted. When dinner was over Morgan declared that he was under a great obligation to his guest, and should at all times be happy to acknowledge it. Poor Millar was quite at a loss. "Well then," said Morgan, "I'll tell you. It is this. I was considered the ugliest son of a bitch in the fleet until you came on board, but you beat me dead hollow; and surely you can't wonder at my being sensible of the obligation." Millar took it well, and all was harmony. Three months later, who should join the ship but MacBride. No sooner had he stepped on board than Millar was sent for by his first lieutenant. "Millar," he said, "you are a happy dog for being relieved so soon. I was the ugliest son of a bitch in the whole fleet for fully a year before you relieved me; and here are you relieved in only three months, for there stands one" — pointing to MacBride — "that beggars all description, and if they were to rake hell they could not find his fellow." Then, going up to MacBride, he shook his hand and asked him to dine that evening with himself and

Millar, "to celebrate the happy event." That seems to me to be something very like the best philosophy.

These reminiscences prepare the reader to find that Gardner and his friends, when in Pisa for a night or so during the carnival, were not precisely a band of reverent Ruskinites. "One of our midshipmen pelted Lord Hervey in his coach, and when told it was the British ambassador, and that he looked very angry, immediately hove another volley at Lady Hervey, observing that she looked better tempered than his Excellency." Returning to Leghorn, they had a strong party of English officers to dinner, which was completed by rolling a waiter in the table-cloth along with the plates and dishes. A midshipman then took a loaf and let it fall from the second-floor window upon the jaw of an Italian in the street; which floored him. No one, however, minded. "Would this," asks Gardner, "have been the case in England, where every hole and corner has a board threatening prosecution, and if you pass two or three stopping in the street, their conversation will be about law, hanging, or trade?"

Gardner's last ship was the *Brunswick*, on which one Rea was captain of marines. "Rea," says Gardner, "although a very worthy fellow, had a great antipathy to the West Indies, and was always cursing Venables and Penn for taking possession of Jamaica, and was sorry Oliver Cromwell did not make them a head shorter for their pains. I have often heard him repeat

the following lines as a morning and evening hymn: —

"'Venables and Penn,
Two bloody-minded men,
In an evil hour
Those seas did explore,
And, blundering about,
This cursed hole found out;
And for so doing
The devil has them stewing;
And with him they may remain
Till we come this way again,
Which we think, howsomdever,
(As our boatswain says) will be never,
And let all the men say Amen.'"

On one glad morning, however, news at last came that peace was declared and the *Brunswick* was to return home and its crew paid off. The master brought the glad tidings, thundering at Gardner's door at five in the morning, and singing this lusty song: —

"'Jolly tars, have you heard the news?
There's peace both by land and by sea;
Great guns are no more to be used,
Disbanded we all are to be.'

'Oh,' says the admiral, 'the wars are all over.'
Says the captain, 'My heart it will break.'
'Oh,' says the bloody first lieutenant,
'What course of life shall I take?'"

But the news was false, and the *Brunswick* was sent back to Jamaica again, and so dispirited was he that Gardner then left the sea for ever.

It is our gain that he carried away from it a marvellous memory. But I think he knew he

had made a mistake in leaving, for there is much wistfulness between the lines of his story. In one place he writes: "We used to fit a tarpaulin in the weather fore-rigging as a screen, and many a pleasant hour have I passed under its lee, with a glass of grog, and hearing long-winded stories. Alas! how dead are times now."

Is not that one of the themes the plaintive melody of which runs through most middle-aged and older lives: "Alas! how dead are times now?" This is my comment, not the brave Gardner's.

CHAPTER XXV

I ASSIST AT TWO WEDDINGS AND HAVE THE BEST OPPORTUNITY FOR CONTRASTING THE GRAVE AND GAY

LIFE has just been varied by two weddings — two: one serious and the other most distinctly the reverse. I attended both.

The first wedding was that of Alf Pinto and Bonnie Birdie Twist; the second — but let us take them in order.

Bonnie Birdie Twist, as her name may suggest, is in the profession too, a sprightly lady vocalist with a high kick and a wink of such calibre that it can carry with deadly effect to the uttermost standing-room.

She has not long entered her kingdom, but is firmly established there now, hardly less profitably than Alf himself. Her particular line of song is the confidential, involving responses from an audience only too ready to oblige, her latest success being entitled, "Is there room in your lap for me?" — a question that produces in every

Hall where she sings an Everlasting Yea that lifts the roof.

Such a lady would hardly have an ordinary wedding; and the ceremony to which I was invited by Mrs. Duckie, and from which I felt I could not abstain without hurting that good woman's feelings, was as far removed from the ordinary as a naphtha lamp is removed from an altar candle.

The wedding was I can hardly say solemnised but achieved under difficulty by a patient and tenacious Islington Registrar in the Maltravers Assembly Rooms, which had been taken for the occasion by Birdie's father. That gentleman, who is now a thriving publican and a very assiduous racing man, was once a heavy-weight champion boxer, while Mrs. Twist, whose plush gown sent the thermometer up five degrees, had her triumphs years ago as Polly Pearl the Coster Queen.

The Assembly Rooms were crowded with warm-hearted professionals in every kind of clothes but the expected, and jovial bookmakers and licensed victuallers — all accompanied by their ladies, and all very gay from the moment they arrived, and gayer still as the day advanced, and the ceremony became more vivacious, and the ex-bruiser's generous flow of wine got to work, and appropriate excerpts from Alf and Birdie's répertoires rose in chorus: so appropriate indeed, that it seemed as if they had been singing all their lives

only by way of preparation for this exuberant festival.

Birdie's bridesmaids were her own sisters, both of whom are budding soubrettes, and four other friends with yellow hair. Be-trice had been implored by Alf to serve too, but she declined, partly on an impulse of natural prudence and partly because the legitimate drama, to which she is affiliated, must not be too friendly with the variety stage.

Alf's best men were a pair of famous knock-abouts who took their duties very seriously, and, to the exquisite enjoyment of the father-in-law, insisted on treating Alf as a boxer in need of minute and exhaustive seconding. They fanned him with red handkerchiefs as he sat back in a state of hilarious exhaustion, and every one else within reach offered him refreshments from a black bottle, and generally and genially did all they could to relieve matrimony from the stigma of holiness.

The Registrar at first seemed a little scandalised, but after a while he resigned himself to the tide of facetiousness and was carried along upon its bosom as buoyantly as any.

The only uncomfortable people there were Mr. and Mrs. Duckie and myself: but it was easy for me, being a mere spectator, to retire into the background, whereas they, simple, affectionate creatures, were perforce in the very forefront of the battle.

Poor Mrs. Duckie was, I fear, more than

uncomfortable, she was shocked and sorrowful. The marriage of her eldest son, I doubt not, had been in her thoughts these many years: and in her visions she had been present with dignity and pride, Mr. Duckie beside her in his very best, and Be-trice so captivating as to make the possibility of the second wedding — the wedding that grows from a wedding, as of course one always should — a certainty. The reality, in which she found herself an alien in a new world (but her son's) of light-hearted laxity, must have been very disturbing.

Mr. Duckie's discomfiture, as charming duettists and dashing serios with gamboge locks patted his cheeks and pulled his whiskers and complimented him on his new daughter-in-law, was more physical, and was another proof of the importance to their importance of important persons keeping to their own natural environment. Here was the autocrat of the Fleet Street grill-room and countless City dinners visibly abashed in broad day. There is, I suppose, no potentate so powerful that skilful transplantation could not make small.

Bonnie Birdie Twist, so soon to be Bonnie Birdie Pinto, or rather Duckie, had a smile for every one, and she continued to recognise her friends, with appropriate greetings, such as "Cheer-O Alice!" "What-ho, Bill!" even while the Registrar was reciting the most compromising of his sentences, which he did to a muffled rendering by most of the company of

Alf's famous chorus, adapted by a quick-witted colleague: —

> "Mr. Right! Mr. Right!
> Our Birdie and he have met;
> So cheer up, girls, and wish them lots of luck,
> And there'll soon be . . ."

but I must not transcribe further.

Could there be a scene more different from that provided on similar occasions by the Establishment? — and yet, I daresay, the knot will last as long and be as honourably respected as if it had tied under even episcopal auspices. Certainly it could not last a shorter time than many that date from the chancel steps.

After the formality what fussing and congratulations! There was room for a few minutes on every one's lap for the bride; and room on hers for every one. Alf meanwhile was not idle, embracing and being embraced; while funny men flung their arms round Mrs. Duckie's neck and reduced her to a mass of scarlet confusion. Mr. Duckie meanwhile was finding his bearings at the buffet; Be-trice was the centre of an admiring circle of lion comiques; and Ern was becoming the firm friend of a boy contortionist (known to the world as Ernesto, the Human Serpent), and rapidly losing his hold on the allurements of chauffing.

I moved among these strange impulsive confident creatures with the deepest interest. All were jolly, all were ready to give and take chaff, there was no faltering in repartee even if there was no

subtlety. And all were fairly hard-working honest-living folk, whose efforts were mainly directed to keeping the ball of pleasure rolling; that is to say, all were in a way unnecessary. I refer particularly to the professionals and the bookmakers; for I suppose that the licensed victuallers, even in times of great national stress, when one can imagine music halls closing all around and race meetings neglected, would still be busy in their shirt sleeves.

Whether the professionals, the bookmakers, or the publicans interested me most, I cannot say; but all were a very curious society, living completely within their own boundaries, so very differently from ordinary persons, and to the casual observer so lawlessly, and yet obeying their own laws too; wholly independent of religion, and yet getting through life with certainly no less kindliness and forgiveness and practical generosity to their names than professedly religious people, if not more; all English, and yet so thoroughly un-English; all busy, or at any rate living fatiguing lives, making money easily and spending it easily, living practically only for to-day. I was glad that I went; I was equally glad to escape.

I moved outside as soon as it seemed time for the couple to leave. They were to be driven off in a taxi-cab, with a comic driver and a string of boots trailing behind it like the tail of a kite. The ordinary bridegroom is careful to remove such appendages as soon as he can. It will give a vivid idea of the character of the Pinto-Twist

wedding when I say that Alf spent some time in helping to fix this one to the cab.

Among the crowd outside I perceived Miss Wagstaff, who, seeing me, joined me, and we chatted together for awhile.

"What do you think of it all?" I asked, as her mouth curled sarcastically at the sight of the string of old boots and the comic men on the Assembly Room steps affecting to faint with grief into each other's arms.

"Very little," she said bitterly. "They're too much alike. A quieter kind of girl would have done him more good."

I stole a glance at her. Had she been nursing a tenderness for Alf herself? One knows so little of one's fellow-creatures.

"And I'm tired of weddings anyhow," she said.

At this point the crowd raised three cheers and then again broke into the chorus of Alf's great song, but in its original form: —

> "Mr. Right! Mr. Right!
> He may not have knocked just yet;
> But, cheer up, girls, he's putting on his boots,
> And he'll soon be here, you bet!"

This they followed with Bonnie Birdie Twist's phenomenal success: —

> "Is there room in your lap for me?"

to which Alf replied by thrusting his head out of the window with a thundering "No!" — and so bride and bridegroom disappeared from view.

The point of Miss Wagstaff's nose soared higher in the air as we took a last look of the scene, and we then turned away together.

"After a wedding, a funeral," she said. "I'm going to see how old Glendinning is. He was so bad on Monday that they had to take him to the hospital. That means getting another cataloguer, I suppose."

"Can't he recover?" I asked.

"Recover! There's nothing to recover on. He's just skin and bone. He's eaten nothing for years; nothing but gin."

I went with her to the hospital, and we were allowed to see the old man. By an extraordinary chance, one of the staff had been a pupil of his in the days of his prosperity as a schoolmaster, and there had been a recognition. The circumstance had turned Mr. Glendinning's thoughts again to that happier period. He was voluble, but quite unconscious of his surroundings.

Miss Wagstaff, with a tenderness of which I had not suspected her, sat by his side and held his hand. He did not recognise her, but called her Ellen and stroked her hair. Where was the real Ellen, I wondered. Never to see him again or be seen by him; that was certain.

As he became more delirious he identified himself more and more with his old post of authority. The weak tremulous lip of the tippler took on a firmness, his watery eye almost flashed. At one moment he was in class construing Xenophon, at another at the nets; but everywhere the instructor

in command. "Don't shift your feet!" he cried to an imaginary batsman. "The ball won't hurt you!" So the old man had been a cricketer too!

We left him still raving, as the nurse called it, but to my thinking happier and nearer his right mind than he had been for many a long year.

And the other wedding?

For that, I must go back a little into time. I told you about old Mrs. Wynne's efforts to find Drusilla a husband among the eligible young men of Ludlow and district. In vain. But a capricious chance can do on its head, as Dollie would say, that which not all the old ladies in Shropshire can compass with bell, book, and candle.

Drusilla, her visit ended, returned to London with a glad heart. She took her place in the express at Shrewsbury, in a third-class compartment with three other persons in it, and settled down to her novel, on excellent terms with herself and the world. She had done her duty and might now do something pleasant — a perfect foundation for peace of mind.

At Wolverhampton two of the three other passengers left, and no other coming in, Drusilla found herself sitting opposite a clean-shaven, grey-eyed young man of determined but agreeable aspect, who was reading *The British Medical Journal.*

Being merely a man, and not obviously a male reformer, this creature naturally had no possible

interest for Drusilla, or should not have had; but our little Drusilla, although still veneered with Purpose and Campaign and all the rest of it, was yet akin to the old Eve too; and, after all, his eyes really were very clear and direct, and his mouth was at once firm and tender, and his hands looked strong and capable and were not wholly shapeless either. There had been worse hands at the Slade, where hands were supposed to mean so much.

It was easy to observe these, for they were holding up *The British Medical Journal* before his face.

Drusilla's thoughts left her novel.

It is a pity that Socialists have such indifferent tailors.

Why should they?

Surely it is possible to be interested in the higher ideals, and also go to a good barber and keep one's knees from bagging?

At any rate, every one knows that there are exceptions to every rule.

No one would read *The British Medical Journal* unless he had some kind of intellect, even if one of the papers on the seat beside him was rather violently pink.

At Leamington the unexpected happened. A Japanese spaniel fell down between the train and the platform just before they stopped, and had a paw crushed by the wheel of Drusilla's carriage. She uttered a cry of anguish as she learned of the accident, and her companion leaped out and,

extricating the little animal, examined the wound and comforted its owner.

Drusilla loved dogs, and the incident led to conversation. He was a doctor at Thomas's. They talked all the way to London.

Where and when Drusilla met her doctor again I do not know, but she lost no time in doing so on our return from Venice, and electrified the family one evening very shortly after by announcing that she was giving up art and intended to be a hospital nurse.

It is an ordeal which many families have to undergo, and it brings forth in most the same blend of resignation, admiration, impatience, and satire. Naomi, who suspected nothing, defended and supported her sister; Alderley was vexed, in part, I think, at the conventionality of the decision from such an independent girl as his second daughter, and in part at the sacrifice of her painting lessons; Mrs. Wynne took it as it came, and hoped for the best, liking moreover the old-fashionedness of a step that seemed to involve a little drudgery and self-sacrifice; while Lionel said something about the uniform — "Not quite so fetching perhaps as the Salvation Army bonnet, but a jolly sight prettier than dingy Slade greens and browns."

All innocently I put my foot into it by saying that I hoped that her Hospital would be Bart's, because I had an uncle who used to be on the staff there, and the circumstance had given me a kind of proprietary interest in the place; but

Drusilla declared for Thomas's, and Thomas's alone, so emphatically as almost to give away her secret.

Lionel, who, for a thoughtless youth, has diabolical luck in his sharpshooting, went on to remark that girls who wished to be hospital nurses had always marked down their doctor first. Naomi told him not to be unkind; but Drusilla's cheeks confessed his accuracy.

As it happened, however, Drusilla never donned the uniform. There was no need.

By an odd chance I was the first person to whom she confided her secret. I say odd chance, because, although we have been happy enough together, I am not exactly a favourite with her. But young women in love when they want a thing done can make exceptions; and, as it happened, I was in the way of being useful to her conquering Adonis.

It seemed that suddenly, out of a clear sky, had dropped the offer of a medical post in Buenos Ayres, at a high salary, the condition being that it was accepted at once. To me, therefore, as an old Argentinian, came Drusilla to ask if I advised it, and what was the hospital like, and would I give introductions if it was accepted — speaking vaguely of some one she was interested in, a friend of a friend, and so on: mystifications so time-worn as to wear every sign-manual of truth.

I disguised my divination of her secret and advised in favour of her friend's friend accepting the appointment, and promised to write any

number of letters of introduction if she would tell me what name to call him by.

She blushed and was silent for a minute, and then she told me all and expressed their intention, contingent apparently upon my opinion being favourable, of being married at once, as she had resolved to bear him company to the new post as his wife.

"Very well," I said, "but kindly let me know when the bomb is to be exploded in the family circle, and I will be careful to dine elsewhere."

If I smiled a little as she told her story, Heaven forgive me, for I would not willingly wound a young and ardent heart; but to have Drusilla's altruistic zeal to be a hospital nurse so suddenly laid bare was more than flesh and blood — at any rate the flesh and blood of my tell-tale lips — could stand. She took it very well, though, as we can take things when we are preoccupied or they make us happy.

Mrs. Duckie came in just as I was ready for Drusilla's wedding, and looked me over approvingly.

"It will be a nicer wedding than ours the other day," she said a little wistfully. "I can't forget those comic men. The idea of comicalities at a wedding! But there, one never knows what the world's coming to! I shan't get my peace of mind back till Be-trice goes off. No comicalities then, I promise you. I mean to write to Canon Lyme to ask him as a great favour to oblige.

His wedding sermons are beautiful. Not a dry eye."

The good woman, she is quite right. Wedding are for tears: only those guests who can cry really enjoy them.

I did not myself cry at Drusilla's, — at least I produced no tears, — but it was a melancholy occasion. Such was the haste that the two families had had no time to become acquainted, and we seemed to be engaged rather in some ceremony of hostility than of fusion. We fell naturally into sides, Montagus, almost, and Capulets.

To add to the difficulty, the father and mother of the bridegroom were so much like several other members of their party that slights were of constant occurrence; but this is a common experience at weddings, where the newness of clothes cancels personality.

However, even weddings come to an end, and by four o'clock we were cheering a departing brougham on its way to Waterloo for Southampton and South America. There was no singing of "Mr. Right," but I felt very little uneasiness as to Drusilla's future. None the less, the more I revolved the matter that evening the more did I wonder that affectionate parents can ever give their consent to their children's marriage at all. I can understand a father having no particular objection to his son's wife, and a mother to her daughter's husband; but how a father can ever even tolerate his daughter's

husband or a mother the wife of her son, that is beyond my imagination. And that night as I watched Alderley's gallant efforts to be gay at dinner I realised my perplexity more than ever.

Life can be very hard on parents.

CHAPTER XXVI

MR. DABNEY AGAIN SUFFERS, AND THE YOUNGER GENERATION DOES NOT KNOCK AT THE DOOR, BUT WALKS RIGHT IN AND TALKS EXTRAORDINARY STRANGE TALK

OLD Mrs. Wynne, who in spite of the failure of her own plans, persists in considering this match her own making, and who came all the way from Ludlow to attend the wedding, paid us a call the next morning, to my great surprise.

While she was sitting in my best chair, who should dash in but Mr. Dabney on his way downstairs. On catching sight of Mrs. Wynne, he was for a swift retreat; but the old lady stopped him and compelled him to sit down and be courteous if not courtly.

As they conversed, her eye, by malignant chance, alighted upon my copy of the *Pickwick Papers*, and she asked me to hand it to her.

"Ah, yes," she said, "*Pickwick!* — what a

wonderful book! You, Mr. Dabney," she continued, "being a literary man, will be interested in hearing that I once met the author of this work."

Mr. Dabney shot me a tragic look.

"Did you indeed?" he said, adding quickly, "but, of course, you told me about it when I had the pleasure of meeting you at dinner in Queen Anne's Gate."

"I don't think so," said Mrs. Wynne. "I don't remember it."

"Assuredly," said Mr. Dabney, "I remember it very vividly."

"Very strange that I should not," replied the old lady; "but it happened in this way. I was at Manchester with me dear husband some time in the sixties. I forget the exact year. Me husband was there on business, and it happened that Mr. Dickens was giving one of his inimitable readings. We all stayed in the same hotel, and Mr. Dickens breakfasted at the same table as ourselves. The toast was not good, and I remember that Mr. Dickens . . ."

At this point I stole gently from the room, for Mr. Dabney, I felt, must be rescued at any cost. Hastily scribbling a note I gave it to Ern, who was bending himself into a hoop on the landing, and telling him to count ten and then bring it to my room, I returned.

Mrs. Wynne had just reached Mr. Thackeray. "It was," she was saying, "at a conversazione at the Royal Society. Me dear husband and I

were leaving at the same time as the great man . . ."

Here came a rap at the door.

"A letter for Mr. Dabney," said Ern, "marked urgent."

"Excuse me a moment," said Mr. Dabney, and took it. He read it gravely, cast me a glance of intense gratitude, and murmuring something about a very important matter, bade Mrs. Wynne a cordial farewell and hurried away.

I heard a jingling of coins outside, and as Ern immediately afterwards descended the stairs four at a time, I guessed that for the moment bulls' eyes superseded contortions.

"A nice man," says Mrs. Wynne, "but not a good listener. His thoughts seem inclined to wander. I hope he is clever in proportion. Did you say he wrote novels? I must read one."

The next day Mrs. Wynne returned to Ludlow, taking the Queen Anne's Gate family, with the exception of Lionel, with her. I was left alone.

It was the first time that Naomi had not been within call ever since I returned to England; and I was lost.

I found that I had nothing to do. Even London withdrew its fascination. I went down to Norfolk to see our old home, and hurried back plunged in melancholy. I drove to Paddington early one morning, intending to go to Ludlow and stay at The Feathers; but at the station I thought better of it, and returned.

In a kind of despair I became a clubman

again, and with the utmost regularity for a few days sat in arm-chairs and read papers and novels and permitted cowed waiters to approach me and supply my needs. I am no clubman by nature, but my father having years and years ago paid my entrance fee to a Pall Mall monastery, I had felt it a pious duty to keep up the subscriptions.

Poor little Drusilla, I thought, how much more efficacious than fines or imprisonment it would be if the magistrates had sentenced the suffrage revolutionaries to spend a few hours observing through a grill the daily routine of a club life! Never would they revolt again. Such a hopelessness would settle on their hearts and brains as would crush out every emotion save despair. Woman's chance in England will come only when she has destroyed the Club.

The evening before the Wynnes returned I went home desperately tired. There had been a heavy thundercloud over London most of the day, and the city was without air. I could easily have slept on an Embankment seat, I was so weary.

On lighting my lamp I had a shock; for in my chair was sitting a young man. Perfectly silent he sat, with an ease of manner, a quiet suggestion of possession, that I resented intensely. He wore a loose tweed suit, and held a pipe in his hand. I could not see his face.

As he gave no sign of observing my entrance I coughed, and then asked if he were waiting for me, and what could I do for him. He replied

that he was waiting for me, but that whether or not I could do anything for him remained to be seen. His voice sounded strangely familiar too, but still he did not move his head, which was a young head with plenty of brown hair not too orderly.

I had a feeling of fear. It seemed uncanny. I advanced nearer, wondering what to do next, when he got up lazily, stretched himself, yawned, and looked round.

I saw his face for the first time, and held to the table or I should have fallen.

"Don't you know me?" he asked.

Know him? Of course I did. It was myself.

Not myself as I am to-day, but myself of twenty-one. I now remembered the suit perfectly too.

I continued to hold on to the table and I felt a little sick. I hate and dread the supernatural. But he soon put me at my ease, or thereabouts.

"How are you?" he said. "I can see it is time I called. Let me look at your face. Yes," he said, after a long scrutiny, "selfish. You think too much of your comfort. You don't believe in anything: there is a self-satisfied superior hardness in your eyes. You have not cried for years. You profess to feel sorry for people, but your philosophy is stronger than your pity. When did you last do an impulsive thing?"

"Impulse," I said, "is largely a matter of inexperience. I have seen a deal of the world." (At the same time I felt that he was doing me a

vile injustice. I really was, I remember thinking, a very kind man.)

"Also," he added, "you're getting fat."

"No," I said, "not fat. That's merely the solidity of age. Remember, I'm getting on."

"Remember," he said bitterly. "How can I forget it? That is why I'm here."

"What do you mean?" I asked him.

"Mean! My dear fellow, I have been watching you for years — ever since you dropped me, in fact, and I've longed to get a good straight talk with you; but I wasn't allowed. Nothing can happen till it is time."

"And why," I asked, trembling and chilling a little, "is it time to-night?" (But I knew why.)

"I can't say," he replied, "but here I am. Let's see, how old exactly are you?"

"Fifty-five."

"Is it so long? How do you spend your time? What do you do?"

"Oh," I said, "I've retired. I read a good deal. I visit my friends. I walk about and talk to people. What should I do?"

"Do you ever get drunk?" he asked.

"Certainly not," I said.

"No, I thought not," he replied, with a sneer. "Nothing so enterprising. You keep on the safe side. But don't forget your old views as to the value of the occasional lapse — let me see, what were the words? — 'the humanising influence of the orgy.' You've grown out of all that, I suppose."

"One's health does not admit it at my age," I said.

"Health!" he echoed. "Of course. I had forgotten that. Or rather, I have laughed at it so long. But tell me, don't you remember me at all? We were very happy, weren't we?"

"Fairly," I said.

"Have you gone back on everything?" he continued. "All those old schemes over the red wine in Soho? We were to do such things! We were to be so keen for the best, and the best only. The best work and the best emotions. We were to help so frankly. We were to do so much to break down the bad barriers between men and women; and now, tell me, what have you to show for it all?"

I didn't feel very comfortable.

"What have you ever done for any one?"

How can one answer questions like that? I had not been so utterly unhelpful, I knew, but I could not begin a catalogue of my beneficences; it was too ridiculous.

"What have you done for any one to-day?" he went on.

I said nothing.

"Where did you dine to-night?"

"To-night I dined at my club."

"What did you do after?"

"I smoked a cigar, read the papers and skimmed a novel, and then came back."

"Did you speak to any one?"

"No one, except a waiter."

"What did you do all day?"

"I was at my tailor's this morning; after lunch I went to Lord's."

"And you call that life?"

"Well, it passed the time."

"With all the world at your feet?"

"I have been busy enough in my day."

"Yes, in a Buenos Ayres counting-house. Did you make money?"

"I have enough."

"Enough for what?"

"For security; for my simple needs, and a little over."

"Your simple needs! Heavens, man, you make me furious. How dare you speak to me of your simple needs and your scrubby little club routine — me, with the old abundant programme still on my lips! Can't you put yourself in my place for a moment and think what it means to see every fine generous resolve gone wrong? How do you suppose it can strike me — yourself at twenty-one, remember — to see such a miscarriage of idealism as you! You, who began so well, and promised to rise so high above the petty ruck; you, who were famous for your fearlessness as a critic of conventions and shams. And now, how do I find you? — an old, timid, selfish clubman, poring over the papers in a cold sweat for fear of losing any of the dirty little dividends that give you the hogwash you call comfort and security. Security! To think that I should ever hear you

use such a word. It was not in your dictionary in my day.

"Oh yes," he hurried on, "I know you're a gentleman, and all that; but that's what's wrong. You weren't going to be a sterile gentleman, you were going to be a real man; you were going to help put things right. And now what do I find you doing?"

He paused for a moment. Then he continued his catechism. "Why didn't you come home now and then from Buenos Ayres?"

"I couldn't, there was no one else to take my place."

"Why didn't you throw it up, then?"

"One does not throw things up."

"No, one does not. One clings to one's little pettifogging habits and one's little mean salary, even in a foreign land, while all that is most real and beautiful and best worth doing is beckoning one away. Prudence dictates the course, expediency controls. And so you turned your back on England and your home for over thirty years. Friends and relations died; it was nothing to you."

"It was everything to me."

"And yet you did not come home. You went on languidly and happily driving some one else's quill in that state of apathetic indolence which denationalisation seems to carry with it, and quietly allowed all that was best in life to slip from you. I know, because I was there."

"Then why didn't you stop me!" I cried.

"Ah! I have touched you," he said; "you have admitted all. I did not stop you because those are the things we have to do without help. I am here to-night not on your account in the least, you have passed beyond my interest, but on account of some one else. Why aren't you married?" he said swiftly.

I began to see what was coming.

"Why?" he repeated. "Have you never loved?"

"Not sufficiently, I suppose."

"Don't you love any one now?"

"How dare you?"

"I am here to dare; remember, I've never grown up; daring is natural enough to me. *I* don't ask for security. Do you love any one now?"

I said nothing.

"You love Naomi," he said.

I said nothing.

"You love her," he repeated, "and — God knows why — she loves you."

"Say that again!" I said.

"She loves you."

"How do you know?"

"I know."

I felt horribly giddy again.

"Now listen," he said, and his voice had become kinder. "This is your last chance. Be a man; give up this amiable idling and do something decisive. Marry her; she's the best woman you'll ever meet, and she'll make you

work. Marry her, old chap; ask her to-morrow, and begin to live again. You've been dead too long."

"Does she really love me?" I asked him; but he had disappeared.

When I woke up I found I was still in my clothes on the sitting-room floor. I crept to bed in a daze.

CHAPTER XXVII

MISS GOLD SHOWS ME THE WAY

I NEED hardly say that I did not sleep more that night. I had two matters of the gravest importance to ponder upon: the shock to my complacency, and the state of my heart.

As to the charges of wasted time, I was bound to admit their general truth; and I did so not only by temperament, for it is my natural tendency to believe in the soundness of an adversary's case, being usually more ready to admit the error than to repulse the accusation, — a poor retrograde frame of mind enough, you will say, but my own, — but also after thought on the subject. I had, there was no doubt, vegetated rather than lived.

But it was not too late to begin; and with that brave piece of optimism for a halter, I gently led the first part of the indictment into the background and left it there.

But then?

Look where I would I saw nothing but the sweet face of Naomi.

That I was never happy away from her, I had

proved; that I thought of her continually, I knew; that if she were to go away, or, worse, marry another, I should live in a world of darkness, I knew. But did this give me the right to ask her to marry me, and would she say yes? How did that young devil know that she loved me?

The whole thing was an absurd dream, realistic enough, but as ridiculous as other dreams.

Having reached this point I began all over again.

At six I got up and walked to Covent Garden and drifted about among the flowers and vegetables. Then I had a Turkish bath, and after breakfast I took a train to Esher. The only person in the world to comfort my wounded spirit and perplexed brain was Miss Gold.

I began with the young man's ultimatum upon myself. I told her everything that had been said on both sides; and I had no difficulty in doing so, for the memory was burnt into my brain. Can it have been a dream? It seemed too real.

"My dear Kent," she said, "why are you so incorrigibly hard on yourself? Don't you see that you are merely the victim of the eternal impatience and illogical cruelty of youth? As far as I can understand, the charge was that you at fifty-five or so no longer act up to the ideals you had at twenty-one. Is it not so? Well, why on earth should you? You would indeed cut a rather absurd figure if you did. What are years for?"

"Ah, yes," I said, "that is the case right enough,

broadly speaking; but of course he had a lot of right on his side. There are many ideals of a young man which it were better not to forget."

"Maybe a few, but the world is a great leveller, and every year brings with it certain modifying influences. I like a man to be his age. Twenty-one is not an age I am very partial to: it is omniscient and exorbitant and cruel; but I like a youth of twenty-one none the less. Forty makes better company: when a man knows how little he knows, and how little life holds for him, and is yet unsubdued.

"My dear Kent," she went on, "do you suppose there is a living creature who would not be vulnerable to the reproaches of his dead selves — even the busiest and most philanthropical of us?"

"Ah," I said, "but my theory is that I should not feel so bad about it if there was not a deal of truth. I am lazy — no one can deny that. I do nothing for any one."

"Not consciously, perhaps," said the dear comforting lady, "but unconsciously, yes. You don't lose your temper. You have pleasant words for those you meet. You write kind letters. You pay cheering calls. You make no one unhappy."

"Oh, that," I said, "that is all natural, and besides it pleases me to be like that."

"And why not?" she answered. "You are not a saint, I know, and you never will be; you will never make any great sacrifice; but that isn't because you would shrink from it if

you had to, but because it is not given to your kind to hear such calls. You are not a saint; but neither are you a humbug. It is not lovely to believe in nothing, but it is far less unlovely than to pretend to believe in something or to make money out of religion. You set an example of intellectual honesty that I personally would put in the balance against a good deal of violent charity and the higher busy-bodiness."

"My dear Agnes," I said, "I did not come here to be flattered, but to arrive at the truth. You are making me as uncomfortable on this side as that young man in my dream made me on the other. I want to hit the middle way."

But I knew what she was driving at; I knew that she knew that I had to be on good terms with myself if I was to unbosom without reserve. Hence her over-kindness.

"Is that all he said to you?" she asked after a while.

"Practically all," I said.

"Nothing in the nature of advice in so many words?"

"It was all advice and scolding," I said.

"Yes," she persisted, "but did he say anything about — about marrying, for example?" She shot a keen glance at me.

I smiled acquiescence.

"Well?" she said.

"Well," said I.

"And why not?" said she; adding sweetly,

"My poor Kent, will you never learn not to be tender-hearted? Will you never give up your bad habit of being sorrier for others than they are for themselves? Let me tell you something: you have never mentioned marriage or love to me because you thought it would be cruel — because you thought that having lost all that, I cannot bear to consider it. My dear Kent, you don't know much about men, but you know nothing about women. Women aren't like that. Women have not that kind of selfishness."

I kissed her poor thin hand, so white and frail.

"Kent, dear," she said, "Kent, dear, how much do you love her?"

"I don't know," I said, or tried to say.

"Enough to . . ."

"I don't know," I said. "I only know that I think of nothing else. But look at the difference in age," I added, for I have never learned to have mercy on myself.

"Now," she answered, drawing her hand away, "now you are talking rubbish. Naomi's years may be only twenty-nine, but she is quite as old as you in many ways, and you are quite as young as she in others."

"But," I said, "I am such a dull, unenterprising . . ."

"Oh, Kent, Kent!" she cried, "when will you learn sense? You are all alike, you men. Your vanity has got to be satisfied. You must assure your own judgment of your own merits. When

will you learn that women don't analyse and appraise; women love. That is enough for them — they love. You may want to know the why and wherefore of your feeling for her, and make catalogues of her merits and beauties, and apply the right adjectives in order to find out and support your line of action and prove your good taste; but all the while you are doing that, the woman is loving. She doesn't love you because of anything — she loves. She doesn't care whether you are handsome or ugly, or old or young, or cruel or kind, or strong or weak, or conceited or humble, whether you drop your h's, or have nothing in the bank — those things are beside the mark, because she loves.

"And to think that you," she continued, "you, moving in the world as you have done, Kent, should come to an old bedridden woman to find out this patent secret! Oh, I'm ashamed of you!"

"Perhaps I was not quite so ignorant as all that," I said, "but there are certain things that one knows and yet that one's humility won't let one know. But do you mean," I continued, "that men cannot really love at all?"

"Not as women can," she replied. "They can desire, they can possess, they can admire, they can serve; but it is not the same thing."

"Then ——" I began.

"Oh no," she hurried on, "not that. It is all as it should be. There is nothing wrong really. Men think they are loving, and therefore it's all

right. But they're all householders and slave-drivers at heart. It's a law of life."

"I too?" I asked.

"Yes, you too, although you're more of a mixture than most. But it doesn't matter; that is the thing you must understand. It is all in the scheme.

"Listen, Kent," she went on. "I am glad this dream came to you. It was time. It would be well if such a dream could come to every man. But you must not be unhappy about it, because it refers to the past, and the fault was not yours. It is given to some persons to develop, to grow up, very slowly. Their youth is stretched out to its utmost length, and perhaps it never ends at all; not always through their own natural immaturity, but by the accidental absence of any crisis in their lives, any event grave enough to pull them together. It has been so with you. You have escaped the grand emotions. I could see directly you came in for the first time in the spring that you had not grown up. You knew a good deal. You had observed closely, but you had felt nothing. You had been waiting. Well, you can't help that: no harm is done; but great harm will be done if you don't behave now. You grew up last night: now live."

"I think if you don't mind I'll go into the garden for a little," I said.

I walked about for some time, and then I came back. She was lying exactly as I had left — more or less as she had been lying for thirty

years. What a life! She smiled at me very beautifully.

"But you said one day," I reminded her, "that Naomi and Trist ought to be brought together."

"True," she answered. "But that was my guile. I wanted to sting you into doing something."

"Well, you have," I replied.

CHAPTER XXVIII

REACHING A POINT WHERE MY HISTORY BEGINS TO BE WORTH RECORDING, I CEASE TO NARRATE IT

"NAOMI," I said, that evening. "Dear Naomi, shall we go into partnership?" She gave me her hand.

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